

PERFORMING LENA:
RACE, REPRESENTATION, AND THE POSTWAR AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
PERFORMANCES OF LENA HORNE

BY

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ABSTRACT

As a hypervisible black woman, whose overdetermined image was evoked by blacks and whites to represent racialized political interests on both sides of the color line throughout the long civil rights era, singer-actress Lena Horne was burdened with the requirement to perform blackness. In this dissertation, I explore Horne's attempts to negotiate these performance expectations during the postwar, McCarthy, and civil rights eras. I contend that Horne self-fashioned a series of politicized black female personas that negotiated, challenged, and appropriated, with varied and often conflicting results, her Hollywood-manufactured glamour girl image in an effort to talk back to the dominant society and talk to her black audiences. Moreover, I argue that Horne's autobiographical performances of politicized blackness reflect and shape the changing, always contested, definitions of black "authenticity" and radical protest politics between 1945 and 1965.

INTRODUCTION

“MEET LENA HORNE”¹

Ever since the 1942 unveiling of Horne as MGM’s “‘new type’ of colored star,” countless journalists, Hollywood and television moguls, biographers, and Lena Horne, herself, have promised fans access to the “real” Lena behind the “reel” Lena.² “But who was the real Lena Horne?” asks biographer James Gavin in the introduction to *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne* (2009).³ Although indebted to Gavin’s work, this dissertation is neither a search for the “true” Lena Horne, nor is it a biography of Lena Horne.⁴

I also want to make clear from the beginning that “Performing Lena” is not a study of Horne’s performances as traditionally defined; it is not an analysis of Horne’s artistic choices as an actor, dancer, and singer.⁵ Rather, “Performing Lena” is an exploration of Horne’s “performative struggle for agency” as enacted through personal narrative, a “task” which, to borrow the words of Richard Schechner, she “take[s] up over and over” throughout the postwar period.⁶ By repeatedly “re-turning to [her] experiences,” Horne creates new stories and new

¹ Bill Chase, “Meet Lena Horne, the ‘New Type’ Sepia Star,” *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, June 20, 1942, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1933).

² Chase, “Meet Lena Horne,” 16. For example, see Robert Rice, “The Real Story of Lena Horne,” *PM*, January 11, 1943, Sunday section, 24. On “real” versus “reel,” see Charlene Regester, *African American Actresses: The Struggle for Visibility, 1900-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 3, 175; and bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

³ James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne* (New York: Atria, 2009), 5.

⁴ Nell Irvin Painter’s study of Sojourner Truth, Farah Jasmine Griffin’s study of Billie Holiday, and Bennetta Jules-Rosette’s study of Josephine Baker provide an important foundation for this dissertation. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997); Farah Jasmine Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), especially xiii; and Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and The Image* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), especially 4-5, 159.

⁵ Susan Manning, “Performance” in *Keywords of American Cultural Studies*, eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, 177-180 (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 177-178.

⁶ Kristin M. Langellier and Eric E. Peterson, “Shifting Contexts in Personal Narrative Performance” in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, eds. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, 151-168 (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2006), 153; Richard Schechner, “Foreword: Fundamentals of Performance Studies” in *Teaching Performance Studies*, eds. Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer, ix-xii (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), ix.

identities.⁷ “Performing Lena” is an examination of the ways Horne uses “the performative power of personal narrative” again and again to reinvent a “real” Lena that resists oppression and claims subjectivity as, in Schechner’s words, “the particulars keep changing.”⁸ As Paul John Eakin argues, “autobiography’s true or real story is the story of the story.”⁹ Therefore, as Farah Jasmine Griffin suggests of Billie Holiday, although “I cannot escape from positing an alternative fictional [Horne],” I hope “Performing Lena” adds to our knowledge of the stories of Horne’s life-stories.¹⁰

African American singer-actress Lena Horne is widely recognized as an important figure in the intersecting arenas of popular culture and civil rights politics during the mid- to late twentieth century. Many remember Horne as the first African American woman to negotiate a long-term Hollywood contract in 1942, but Nina Mae McKinney, not Horne, was the first black actress to sign such a contract, agreeing to a five-year deal with MGM in 1929. More accurately, Horne’s contract represented the first time MGM signed a black performer to the standard *seven*-year contract typical of the studio’s white players. Likewise, Horne is remembered as Hollywood’s first black glamour girl, described as “the Negro Hedy Lamarr.”¹¹ Yet, the dominant press named McKinney, the “dusky Clara Bow” over a decade prior to its celebration of Horne’s “dusky glamour.”¹² Likewise, McKinney’s recognition in the white press as “assuredly one of the most beautiful women of our time” preceded Horne’s fame as the black

⁷ Langellier and Peterson, “Shifting Contexts in Personal Narrative Performance” in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, 155.

⁸ Langellier and Peterson, “Shifting Contexts in Personal Narrative Performance” in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, 154; Richard Schechner, “Foreword” in *Teaching Performance Studies*, ix.

⁹ Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 166.

¹⁰ Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free*, xiii.

¹¹ “Song Seller,” *Newsweek*, January 4, 1943, 65.

¹² Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* (New York: Ballantine, 2005), 91-93.

star “who [won] glorification as a beautiful American girl.”¹³ My aim here is not to split hairs, but rather to highlight the desire of journalists, white and black, to construct Horne as an important black “first” during World War II and the cold war when exposure of the atrocities of Jim Crowism challenged America’s self-image as the leader of freedom and democracy.

In his exploration of the relationship between black popular culture and black politics, scholar Richard Iton notes that African Americans experienced “political disfranchisement on the one hand and overemployment in the arenas of popular culture on the other.”¹⁴ Richard Dyer highlights the significance of the relationship *between* political representations and pop-cultural representations for African Americans, suggesting that the popular portrayal of one black American – like Lena Horne – as representative of the race as a whole affects how African Americans view themselves, their place within American society, and their right to the “inalienable” rights the United States professes to guarantee its citizens.¹⁵ At the same time, this popular portray of a “representative” African American affects how members of the dominant society view black Americans, their place, and their rights, making popular representations highly political.¹⁶ With African Americans largely excluded from the formal realm of city, state, and national politics, Iton contends, “popular culture was an integral and important aspect of the making of politics throughout the pre-civil rights era and the civil rights era itself.”¹⁷ Individual black artists, like Paul Robeson, Iton points out, were often conferred a symbolic status, “called on to play [activist] roles,” negotiate “the definition of the aggregate black agenda,” and

¹³ Richard Watts Jr. of *The New York Post* on Nina Mae McKinney quoted in Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mammies, Mulattoes, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 33; “18 on Honor Roll of Race Relations: 6 White Persons or Institutions among Them Win Places after a Nation-Wide Poll,” *New York Times*, February 13, 1944, 42.

¹⁴ Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

¹⁵ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

¹⁶ Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 1.

¹⁷ Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 6.

represent “the black general will.”¹⁸ At the same time, white America pointed to exceptional black artists – like Robeson and Horne – whose talents gained them the relative acceptance of white society, as evidence of American democracy at work. Constructed by whites and blacks as “a symbol of and for her race” in the tradition of Robeson, Horne must take on what Vershawn Ashanti Young theorizes as “the burden of racial performance.”¹⁹ Although, as Young argues, “the requirement to perform race is pervasive” for all African Americans, as a hypervisible black woman, whose overdetermined image is evoked by blacks and whites to represent racialized political interests on both sides of the color line throughout the long civil rights era, Horne is especially burdened by the requirement to perform “blackness.”²⁰

In this dissertation, I explore Lena Horne’s attempts to negotiate these performance expectations during the postwar, McCarthy, and civil rights eras. I contend that Horne self-fashioned a series of politicized black female personas that negotiated, challenged, and appropriated, with varied and often conflicting results, her Hollywood-manufactured glamour girl image in an effort to talk back to the larger racist, colorist, sexist, and classist society and talk to her African American audiences. Moreover, I argue that Horne’s performances of politicized blackness reflect and shape the changing, always contested, definitions of black “authenticity” and radical protest politics during the postwar period, an era defined by sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant, as “a racial crucible.”²¹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6, 2, 32, 38, 5.

¹⁹ Kathleen Thompson, “Lena Horne” in *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, I, A-L (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 580; Vershawn Ashanti Young, “Introduction: Performing Citizenship” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie: Black Middle-Class Performances*, eds. Vershawn Ashanti Young and Bridget Harris Tsemo, 1-38 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 20.

²⁰ Vershawn Ashanti Young, *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*, kindle ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), loc. 198-99.

²¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 95.

In addition to expanding our understanding of an important African American female entertainer and political figure, “Performing Lena” highlights the exploration, negotiation, and opposition surrounding shifting definitions and performances of gendered and classed blackness during the long civil rights era. It continues Richard Iton’s work exploring the significance of the black artist-activist within the intersecting realms of black popular culture and black politics between 1945 and 1965.²² This project also underscores the changing “nature of black ‘militancy’ or ‘radicalism’” within the realm of formal politics during the postwar, cold war, and civil rights eras.²³ At the same time, this dissertation highlights “the political significance of everyday forms of resistance” alongside more traditional modes of black protest.²⁴ Moreover, this work illuminates the ways African American women have used autobiography “to ‘talk back,’ to embody subjectivity,” and to construct an identity in opposition to the dominant culture that oppresses them.²⁵ Finally, this project contributes to scholarship that seeks to destabilize notions of a static, essential self, underscoring the performative aspects of identity and autobiography.

Biographical Context

Although, as Farah Jasmine Griffin suggests, I risk telling yet another version of Horne’s “real” life-story, I believe a brief outline of Horne’s life and career – drawn from her many

²² Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 6.

²³ Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 16.

²⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 7.

²⁵ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women’s Autobiographical Practices” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 3-56 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 16; also see bell hooks, “Writing Autobiography,” in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 155-59.

biographies and my own primary-source research – provides necessary context for “Performing Lena.”²⁶

Lena Calhoun Horne was born to Edwin F. Horne, Jr., a numbers runner, and Edna Scottron Horne, an aspiring actress, on June 30, 1917. Both of Lena’s parents were raised in middle-class families, who believed in the performance of respectability and civil rights work as strategies for racial uplift. Her parents’ professional choices flouted parental expectations that they would study to become teachers, lawyers, doctors, social workers, or civil servants. Lena grew up in her family’s Brooklyn home, where she lived with her mother, father, and paternal grandparents, Cora Calhoun Horne and Edwin F. Horne. When she was three, Lena’s parents divorced, leaving her in her grandparents’ care. Four years later, Edna returned to Brooklyn to reclaim her daughter; the two traveled the South – staying temporarily with relatives, friends, and strangers – as Edna looked for work as an actress. Eventually, Lena returned to her grandparents’ home in Brooklyn, where she attended school. When Lena was fourteen, her mother returned to New York remarried, ready to retrieve her daughter. Excluded by Brooklyn’s black middle class because of her interracial marriage to Miguel Rodriguez, a white man of Cuban descent, and her continued pursuit of an acting career, Edna moved with Miguel and Lena to a poor neighborhood in the Bronx.

At the age of sixteen, Lena Horne quit school to join the chorus line at the Cotton Club in Harlem. While under contract with the Cotton Club, she appeared on Broadway in *Dance with Your Gods* in 1934. The following year, black performer Noble Sissle offered Horne a job singing with his all-black orchestra. Accepting Sissle’s offer, she left the exploitative Cotton

²⁶ Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free*, 23. In addition to Gavin’s *Stormy Weather*, biographies of Horne include Brett Howard, *Lena Horne* (Los Angeles: Holloway House, 1981); James Haskins with Kathleen Benson, *Lena: A Personal and Professional Biography of Lena Horne* (New York: Stein and Day, 1984); Gail Lumet Buckley, *The Hornes: An American Family* (New York: Knopf, 1986); and Leslie Palmer, *Lena Horne: Entertainer* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989).

Club. While performing as the lead vocalist with Noble Sissle's Society Orchestra in Pittsburgh, Horne's father introduced her to Louis Jones. After marrying Jones in 1937, Horne temporarily left the stage for domestic life; during this period, she had two children with Jones. In December 1938, Horne gave birth to her daughter Gail, followed by her son Edwin (Teddy) in February 1940. After Gail's birth, Horne starred in her first film, Million Dollar's all-black production of *The Duke Is Tops* (1938), alongside Ralph Cooper. The next year, Horne played the lead in Lew Leslie's unsuccessful production of *Blackbirds of 1939* on Broadway.

In 1940, Horne left her husband and children in Pittsburgh as she looked for a job as a vocalist in New York. That year, Horne returned to show business as the lead singer with Charlie Barnet's all-white band. As the band toured the South, *de jure* and *de facto* segregation made Horne's tenure as a black singer with a white ensemble difficult, both logistically and emotionally. Having secured employment with Barnet, Horne returned to Pittsburgh to reclaim her children from their father; although Gail traveled with Horne to New York, Teddy remained with Louis in Pittsburgh. Estranged, Horne and Jones finalized their divorce in 1944. While singing with Barnet's band, Barney Josephson hired Horne to perform at Café Society Downtown. At the integrated Café Society, Horne met Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); she also developed friendships with the renowned singer-activist Paul Robeson and with other politicized musicians, black and white. Under the advisement of White, Horne accepted an opportunity to perform at a Hollywood nightclub, the Little Troc, in 1942.

That year, Lena Horne signed her historic Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) contract and appeared in her first film, *Panama Hattie*, as an unnamed Panamanian, singing "The Sping" and "Just One of Those Things." In *Broadway Rhythm* (1944) and *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946), Horne

would reprise her role as “an exotic, ethnic, ‘South of the Border’ variety entertainer.”²⁷ The year 1943 proved pivotal for Horne. *Life*, *Newsweek*, and *Time* featured articles introducing her to a primarily white audience, lauding her Savoy-Plaza performances, and publicizing her fledgling film career. Also in 1943, MGM and Twentieth Century Fox produced two black-cast musicals starring Horne: *Cabin in the Sky* and *Stormy Weather*, respectively. These films made Horne a favorite pinup girl among black GIs and she traveled America entertaining soldiers in segregated training camps throughout World War II. Despite her popularity, Hollywood failed to offer Horne an opportunity to act in a dramatic role. When Horne appeared in films showcasing primarily white casts – such as *Thousands Cheer* (1943), *Two Girls and a Sailor* (1944), *Words and Music* (1948), and *Duchess of Idaho* (1950) – MGM confined her performances to extravagant singing sequences, easily excised by Southern censors without disrupting plot development. While Hollywood professed racial tolerance, it continued to bolster racism. Frustrated by Hollywood’s institutionalized discrimination, Horne left MGM in 1950.

In the late 1940s, as her career in Hollywood came to an end, Horne became increasingly politicized. She worked actively with politically progressive groups, including the Council on African Affairs, the Hollywood Independent Citizens’ Committee of Arts and Sciences, and Progressive Citizens of America. During this same period, Horne wrote a personal opinion column, titled “From Me to You,” in Adam Clayton Powell Jr.’s militant black newspaper the *People’s Voice*. In 1947, with interracial marriage ceremony still banned in California, Horne had secretly married Jewish composer Lennie Hayton in Paris. They publically revealed their marriage in 1950. That same year, the anticommunist tract *Red Channels* listed Horne as a communist sympathizer; as a result, she faced blacklisting by film, radio, and television

²⁷ Kristin A. McGee, *Some Liked It Hot: Jazz Women in Film and Television, 1928-1959* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), 239.

producers. Also in 1950, Horne published an as-told-to autobiography titled *In Person: Lena Horne* with Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss.

Despite the blacklist, Horne embarked on a successful career in night clubs, both at home and abroad. She earned rave reviews for her engagements at the Waldorf Astoria in New York, the Sands in Las Vegas, and the Coconut Grove in Los Angeles. Horne also appeared as a guest on several television variety programs, including *Toast of the Town* and *Your Show of Shows*, throughout the 1950s. In 1957, she starred on Broadway as “Savannah” in the predominantly black-cast production of *Jamaica* opposite Mexican actor Ricardo Montalban. Behind the scenes, Horne continued to challenge the entertainment industry’s institutionalized racism by working with *Jamaica* producer David Merrick to employ the first black stagehands to work on a Broadway show, including Charlie Blackwell, the first African American stage manager. Throughout this period, Horne continued to protest racial inequality, writing annual letters – personal appeals decrying racism and advocating the civil rights initiatives of the NAACP – as the chairperson of the organization’s Christmas Seals for Freedom Drive. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Horne also parlayed her fame as beauty icon to launch the short-lived Lena Horne Cosmetics Company.

In the 1960s, Horne left nightclubs for the civil rights movement. Drawing on her experiences as an African American singer-actress, mother, and woman, Horne spoke of her own experience in Jim Crow America at civil rights protests. She eschewed singing popular love songs for chic white nightclub patrons, adopting a new repertoire of movement songs, which she performed for integrated audiences of activists at civil rights rallies and benefits. Horne marched alongside fellow protesters at Southern demonstrations and at the March on Washington in 1963. She also acted as a spokeswoman on behalf of Delta Sigma Theta and the National Council of

Negro Women, telling her life-stories to African American women throughout the South. In 1965, Horne published a second autobiography, *Lena*, co-written with white author Richard Schickel. Horne returned to the silver screen in 1969 as “Claire Quintana,” a bawdyhouse madam, who weds “Frank Patch,” a white marshal, in *Death of a Gunfighter*. While the film leaves race and ethnicity unmentioned, Horne’s character’s surname, Quintana, and the film’s setting, suggest she is of Mexican, not African American, descent. Despite its integrated cast and “colorblind” representation of a mixed marriage, Hollywood characterized Horne as an exotic “South of the Border” type again, suggesting its continued reticence to examine the theme of black-white interracial marriage onscreen.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Horne appeared as “herself” on several popular television programs, featuring black or multiracial casts, including *The Flip Wilson Show* (1970, 1971, 1971, 1974), *Sanford and Son* (1973), *Sesame Street* (1973, 1976), *The Muppet Show* (1976), and *The Cosby Show* (1985). In 1978, Horne revisited Hollywood to portray “Glinda the Good” in the screen adaptation of the black-cast musical *The Wiz* alongside Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, and Richard Pryor. At the age of sixty-four, Horne performed her life-stories through song with *Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music* (1981-1984). The longest running one-woman Broadway show, *The Lady and Her Music* won Horne critical acclaim, garnering a special Tony award, two Grammy awards, the Drama Desk Award, a Drama Critics’ Citation, the New York City Handel Medallion, and the Dance Theatre of Harlem’s Emergence Award. In the 1990s, Lena Horne continued to perform autobiographically, appearing in an episode of Bill Cosby’s *A Different World* (1993), MGM’s documentary retrospective *That’s Entertainment! III* (1994), and *American Masters’* television presentation of “Lena Horne: In Her Own Words” (1996).

Horne's life is the subject of several biographies, including her daughter Gail Lumet Buckley's *The Hornes: An American Family* (1986) and James Gavin's recent *Stormy Weather* as well as a children's book, *Lena Horne: Entertainer* (1989), by Leslie Palmer. Several performance pieces, for instance Wendi Joy Franklin's musical drama, *A Song For You...Lena*; Leslie Uggam's musical *Stormy Weather: Imagining Lena Horne*; James Gavin's *Stormy Weather: The Lena Horne Project*, a concert starring former Supreme Mary Wilson and narrated by Gavin; and director Susan Batson's *The Beauties*, starring singer-actress Ryan Jyllian as Horne, also draw their inspiration from Horne's life-stories. Despite the brevity of her career as a screen actress, Horne is celebrated for expanding the opportunities available to future African American actresses, especially those who share her phenotype and skin color, like Halle Berry, the first and only black woman to win an Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role for her controversial performance in *Monster's Ball* (2001). In 2003, ABC announced it would produce a biopic starring Janet Jackson as Horne; however, following Jackson's infamous "wardrobe malfunction" during her February 2004 Super Bowl halftime performance with Justin Timberlake, ABC shelved the project. In 2007, Oprah Winfrey publicized her intention to produce a biopic featuring Alicia Keys as Horne. On May 9, 2010, Lena Horne passed away at the age of ninety-two; upon her death, countless obituaries and remembrances, traversing numerous media formats, honored her life and legacy.

Existing Scholarship

Despite agreement concerning Horne's significance and her ability to remain "so remarkably contemporary," both artistically and politically, throughout her lifetime, the complexities of her self-representations as an artist-activist within "the politics/popular culture

matrix” during the cold war and civil rights periods remain largely unanalyzed.²⁸ Although a body of Horne scholarship exists, the majority of these brief studies explore Lena Horne’s wartime significance as a “new type” of black actress; collectively, they analyze Horne’s on-screen representations, film and cabaret performances, and strategies for resisting racism during the 1940s and early 1950s. As Shari Roberts suggests, Lena Horne represented both a solution and a challenge for a film industry tasked with mobilizing black support for the war effort. On the one hand, Hollywood’s portrayal of Horne offered both white and black audiences the “illusion of racial equality and tolerance.”²⁹ On the other, Horne’s sexual appeal – and its signification of what Roberts terms “an erotics of miscegenation” – proved problematic.³⁰ “She cannot be shown in a relationship with a white man,” Richard Dyer contends, and so Hollywood’s solution is to “separate Horne off, to fix and contain her.”³¹ As several scholars have argued, Hollywood “contained” and “confined” the threat of Horne’s image by repeatedly casting her as a singer and relegating her to white-directed black-cast musicals or to “specialty acts” in musicals starring white principles.³²

In her cameo appearances, Horne performed one of two roles: “a generic south of the border” exotic or “herself,” the glamorous nightclub chanteuse.³³ Whereas Roberts argues that MGM’s “‘Latinization’” of Horne in *Panama Hattie* (1942), *Broadway Rhythm* (1944), and

²⁸ Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 17.

²⁹ Shari Roberts, “Seeing Stars: Feminine Spectacle, Female Spectators, and World War II Hollywood Musical,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1993), 182; also see 101, 117, 122-123, 124, 131, 182.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 96; also see 104-105, 117, 182.

³¹ Richard Dyer, “Singing Prettily: Lena Horne in Hollywood” in *In the Space of a Song: The Uses of Song in Film*, kindle ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), loc. 2920-22, 2706-7.

³² Roberts, “Seeing Stars,” 111; Dyer, “Singing Prettily,” loc. 2904-9, 3093-96; Arthur Knight, “Star Dances: African-American Constructions of Stardom, 1925-1960” in *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 405; Richard Dyer, “The Colour of Entertainment” in *Only Entertainment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 39.

³³ Gloria Silvana Monti, “This Ain’t You, Girl!: Performing Race and Ethnicity in Hollywood” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2000), 118n26, 148, 119, 123; Kristin A. McGee, *Some Liked It Hot: Jazz Women in Film and Television, 1928-1959*, kindle ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), loc. 5098-5102; Dyer, “Singing Prettily,” loc. 2839-44.

Ziegfeld Follies (1946), “undercuts the importance of her racial specificity, and overrides it, making her more safe and acceptable” to white audiences, Gloria Silvana Monti illuminates the potentially transgressive quality of Horne’s south of the border impersonations to “subvert the idea of race affiliation as a biological category.”³⁴ Although Horne’s performances as a Latin(ish) entertainer highlight the performative aspect of race, this hardly seems the studio’s intent. Rather, as Roberts and Dyer suggest, MGM’s representation of Horne as “Latin” is meant to counteract the fantasies of miscegenation across the U.S. color line that her image signifies by placing Horne “safely in no place.”³⁵ As Donald Bogle and I have noted elsewhere, this Hollywood strategy of containing the sexual appeal of light-skinned African American women by representing them as “foreigners” predates Horne; Hollywood cast Carolynne (Caroline) Snowden in bit roles as Mexicans and Spaniards in several silent films of the 1920s and Etta Moten as the “‘Carioca’ Girl” in *Flying Down to Rio* (1935).³⁶

In addition to Hollywood’s Latinization of Horne, MGM primarily cast Horne as “herself, *Miss Lena Horne*” – an elaborately gowned and coiffed, bourgeois entertainer, who sang love songs and Tin Pan Alley tunes for white audiences, but never spoke to them. By representing Horne in this manner, Hollywood established a second method of containing her image’s signification of sex across the color line. As Charlene Regester notes, “In film after film, promoting Horne as [‘herself’] seemed to be the Hollywood technique for negotiating the competing views of spectators.”³⁷ Several scholars note that this strategic construction of Horne

³⁴ Roberts, “Seeing Stars,” 113; Monti, “This Ain’t You Girl!,” 9, 148.

³⁵ Roberts, “Seeing Stars,” 113; Dyer, “Singing Prettily,” loc. 2861-71.

³⁶ On Carolynne Snowden see Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mammies, Mulattoes, and Bucks*, 26, and Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams*, 29-30, 69-73, 80-81. On Etta Moten, see Megan E. Williams, “Imaging Lena Horne: Race and Representation in 1940s America” (MA thesis, University of Kansas, 2006), 14, and Megan E. Williams, “‘Lena Not the Only One’: Representations of Lena Horne and Etta Moten in *The Call*, 1941-1945” *American Studies* 51, no. 1-2 (2009): 5-23; also see “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,” in *The Black Women Oral History Project*, ed. Ruth Edmonds Hill, 137-233 (Westport: Meckler, 1991), 2:166.

³⁷ Regester, *African American Actresses*, 196.

as glamorous black female entertainer worked as a “blank screen” – offering “a kind of blankness which spectators use for their own projections.”³⁸ Although Horne has suggested her image “stood between the two conventional ideas of Negro womanhood: the [...] servant – and the whore,” as I argue elsewhere, Hollywood’s representations of Horne as “herself” allowed white spectators to project these very stereotypes of the black woman as nurturing mammy or insatiable octoroon onto Horne’s body.³⁹ Similarly, Donald Bogle argues that Hollywood’s depiction of Horne as singer, maintained stereotypes of African Americans as inherently rhythmic and “natural-born entertainers.”⁴⁰

In spite of Hollywood’s objectification, marginalization, and silencing of Horne by confining her to “nonnarrative, nonnarrativized,” and nonspeaking roles, several scholars argue that Horne’s on-screen performances “triumph over the limitations of their presentation,” resisting the miscegenistic gaze and allowing spectators space for “oppositional” readings.⁴¹ Richard Dyer has described Horne’s self-fashioned image – “its refusal to corroborate, by any hint of the person giving her self, the image of black sexuality that was being wished on her” – as a “strategy of survival.”⁴² Similarly, Shane Vogel, in the most thorough scholarly analysis of Horne’s “impersonal” performance persona, theorizes Horne’s onstage affect “as a strategic mode of black performance” cultivated in opposition to white spectators’ expectation that black women, who sang on the segregated cabaret stage, perform openness.⁴³ By “unperforming the

³⁸ Roberts, “Seeing Stars,” 141; Karen Alexander, “Fatal Beauties: Black Women in Hollywood” in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill, 45-56 (New York: Routledge, 1991); also see Williams, “Imaging Lena,” 2-3; Dyer, “Singing Prettily,” loc. 3267-70.

³⁹ Lena Horne and Richard Schickel, *Lena* (1965; reprint, New York: Limelight Editions, 1986), 2-3; Williams, “Imaging Lena,” 1-26.

⁴⁰ Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 118.

⁴¹ Knight, “Star Dances,” 404-405; Dyer, “Singing Prettily,” loc. 3097-98; Shane Vogel, “Lena Horne’s Impersona” *Camera Obscura* 67 23, no. 1 (2008), 11-45; bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1992), 115-131.

⁴² Richard Dyer, “Introduction” in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 15.

⁴³ Vogel, “Lena Horne’s Impersona,” 12.

self,” Vogel argues Horne created “a space of provisional subjective agency.”⁴⁴ Likewise, Dyer highlights the “subversive” qualities of Horne’s performance style in her mainstream musical cameos despite Hollywood’s efforts to contain her to the small space of the cabaret stage and to scenes extraneous to the plot.⁴⁵ Describing Horne’s *Duchess of Idaho* (1950) performance of “Baby Come Out of the Clouds,” Dyer writes, “At one point near the beginning of the number...she puts her left foot up on a bench to the side of the stairwell, crooking her leg, and puts her hand on her hip.” Arguing that Horne’s pose signifies “deliberate taking up of space,” Dyer posits this performance as “a little defiance of confinement.”⁴⁶

In addition to these essays exploring Horne’s onstage and on-screen acts of defiance, studies by Charlene Regester and Kwakiutl L. Dreher highlight Horne’s offstage struggles against wartime racism and sexism. In an essay defining black actresses Hazel Scott and Lena Horne as African American “feminists” and political activists, Regester argues that Scott and Horne deserve recognition, not just as entertainers, but as wartime civil rights activists who “used their position and talent as a tool of power making anti-discriminatory demands” of a mainly white, male-dominated film industry.⁴⁷ Likewise, Dreher, in her discussion of Lena Horne during World War II, suggests viewing Horne as “an activist entertainer,” who uses her MGM contract “as a tool for speaking out in the news media about the inequities of the Hollywood system.”⁴⁸ In her most recent treatment of Horne, Regester again emphasizes the importance of viewing her as a wartime activist, who challenged discrimination and segregation

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁵ Dyer, “Singing Prettily,” loc. 2889-96, 3272-80.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, loc. 3060-68.

⁴⁷ Charlene Regester, “Hazel Scott and Lena Horne: African American Divas, Feminists, and Political Activists.” *Popular Culture Review* 7 (February 1996): 81.

⁴⁸ Kwakiutl L. Dreher, *Dancing on the White Page: Black Women Entertainers Writing Autobiography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 40, 57.

in Hollywood and the larger society through her landmark contract negotiations and her political affiliations with numerous progressive, anti-racist organizations.⁴⁹

This project expands and complicates this work by exploring Horne's continued significance within the "the politics/popular culture matrix" *following* World War II.⁵⁰ Additionally, the majority of Horne scholarship fails to explore the implications of her serial self-fashioning. In their analyses of Lena Horne's wartime representations, performances, and resistance strategies, most Horne scholars tend to privilege her second autobiography *Lena*, reading it as a transparent recounting of her lived life, rather than as an historically-specific performance of identity. On the other hand, when scholars use several of Horne's autobiographical texts in their analyses (for example, Monti draws on published interviews, *Lena*, *The Lady and Her Music*, and "Lena Horne: In Her Own Voice" and Dreher relies on both *In Person* and *Lena*) they too overlook the importance of reading these as distinct (though connected) identity performances requiring historicization. Instead, I agree with Shane Vogel, who reads *Lena* as a "performative act of fashioning a life and creating a persona" rather than "as a truth claim about what 'really occurred.'"⁵¹

Reading Autobiographies as Performances

Because many people consider identity the manifestation of an inner "essence" that results in a coherent and unified self, many believe autobiography is a straightforward recounting of the author's past, offering the "true" story of her "real" life. For example, Kwakiult L. Dreher views autobiography "as a lens for seeing...the real [story] of Horne" – as a window to "the real

⁴⁹ Regester, *African American Actresses*, 209.

⁵⁰ Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 17.

⁵¹ Vogel, "Lena Horne's Impersona," 22; Shane Vogel, "Jamaica on Broadway: The Popular Caribbean and Mock Transnational Performance," *Theatre Journal* 62 (March 2010), 21.

person” behind her Hollywood image.⁵² Rather than viewing personal narratives as emanating from an essential self, I draw on the work of scholars who conceptualize autobiographical representation as “as a performative act, never transparent, that constitutes subjectivity in the interplay of memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency.”⁵³ Therefore, in “Performing Lena,” I approach Horne’s written and spoken personal narratives as *autobiographical performances*.⁵⁴

“In performance studies,” writes Richard Schechner, one of the founders of the interdiscipline, “texts...are studied ‘as’ performances. That is they are regarded as practices, events, and behaviors, not as ‘objects’ or ‘things.’ ...performance studies inquires about the ‘behavior’ of, for example, [an autobiography].”⁵⁵ Throughout “Performing Lena,” I analyze Horne’s serial autobiographical storytelling as “a retrospective and an ongoing performance” – more “practice” than a collection of disparate texts.⁵⁶ I draw on the work of Kathy Ogren and Sherrie Tucker to theorize Horne’s autobiographical performances as attempts to fashion public identities.

In her analysis of jazz autobiographies, Ogren theorizes autobiographies as “textual performances” through which jazz musicians construct performance personas; she maintains that scholars “need to recognize the possibilities – not merely the limitations – of self-fashioned

⁵² Dreher, *Dancing on the White Page*, 15, 4.

⁵³ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “Introduction: Mapping Women’s Self-Representation at Visual/Textual Interfaces” in *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance*, eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 1-46 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 4.

⁵⁴ Deidre Heddon defines “autobiographical performances” as “performances that are ostensibly at least about some ‘self.’” She writes, “‘Autobiographical performance’ [...] is adopted in this text as a broad term which encompasses examples of solo autobiographical work, community and applied drama, oral narrative and oral history performance, verbatim drama, documentary drama, testimonial performance, performance art and instances of site-specific and time-based practice. The risk is that the field is deemed too large to be useful; however, the limits are set by a strict focus on the *auto* and *bio*.” See Deidre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6, 11.

⁵⁵ Schechner, “Foreword” in *Teaching Performance Studies*, x.

⁵⁶ Langellier and Peterson, “Shifting Contexts in Personal Narrative Performance” in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, 158.

personas.”⁵⁷ Similarly, Sherrie Tucker calls for viewing oral history narratives as “telling performances,” arguing that women musicians negotiate, construct, and maintain their gendered and raced identities as jazz musicians through narrative-telling.⁵⁸ Additionally, Tucker argues that jazzwomen’s telling performances work to make “women visible in a history which erased them.”⁵⁹

As Deidre Heddon suggests, this attraction of narrative self-fashioning for marginalized subjects – like the jazzwomen interviewed by Tucker – reflects their view of autobiographical performance “as a means to reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalisation and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency.”⁶⁰ Because autobiographical performances provide women with a vehicle “to talk out, talk back, talk otherwise,” writes Heddon, many scholars highlight autobiographical performance’s “potential for agency.”⁶¹

As Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith argue, “situated in a specific time and place,” the autobiographical subject is “inescapably in dialogue with the culturally marked differences that inflect models of identity and underwrite the formation of autobiographical subjectivity.”⁶² Although “our position in a field of large-scale cultural forces” shapes “the selves that we think we are and the life-stories we think we’ve lived,” as Paul John Eakin suggests, our agency lies in “the *act* of making life-stories” – “we get the good of saying and writing who we are.”⁶³

Therefore, in this dissertation, I will explore Horne’s attempts to assert agency, claim

⁵⁷ Kathy Ogren, “‘Jazz Isn’t Just Me’: Jazz Autobiographies as Performance Personas” in *Jazz in Mind: Essays on the History and Meanings of Jazz*, eds. Reginald T. Buckner and Steven Weiland, 112-127 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 112.

⁵⁸ Sherrie Tucker, “Telling Performances: Jazz History Remembered and Remade by the Women in the Band,” *The Oral History Review* 26 (Winter/Spring 1999), 68.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁰ Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance*, 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Smith and Watson, “Introduction” in *Interfaces*, 8-9.

⁶³ Eakin, *Living Autobiographically*, 147, 89.

subjectivity, and exercise control over her overdetermined image by analyzing her “serial self-representations” as *historically-specific, embodied performances of race, class, and gender identity*.⁶⁴

Identity as Performative

As sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant suggest, “There is a continuous temptation to think of race as an *essence*, something fixed, concrete and objective.”⁶⁵ This “temptation” persists despite agreement among historians, sociologists, and scientists that race is a socio-historical concept – one in which the dominant culture ascribes meaning to particular physical features (“so-called ‘phenotypes’”) or cultural practices that are used to uphold racism and discrimination – rather than an unchanging biological or genetic phenomenon.⁶⁶ On the other hand, it is perhaps equally tempting to view race as a mere “*illusion*.”⁶⁷ But, as Omi and Winant argue, this view occludes race’s continued significance as “a dimension of human representation” that “*symbolizes social conflicts*” and structures everyday life in the United States; rather, they argue for conceptualizing race as “an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.”⁶⁸ Whereas Omi and Winant argue that race is neither an epiphenomenon, nor subsumable within a “supposedly more fundamental category,” I believe that race is inadequately understood outside of its interrelationship with other fundamental categories of identity and systems of inequality.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Smith and Watson, “Introduction” in *Interfaces*, 7.

⁶⁵ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 54.

⁶⁶ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 55; Margaret L. Andersen and Howard F. Taylor, *Sociology: The Essentials*, 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2011), 237.

⁶⁷ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 55.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

Consequently, I analyze Lena Horne's identity and social location using an intersectional framework outlined by feminist sociologists Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins.⁷⁰ Intersectionality theorizes race, class, and gender as (1) interconnected, socially constructed, categories of individual and group identity, and, at the same time, (2) systems of power and inequality that structure people's lives, their access to opportunities and resources.⁷¹ Therefore, Horne's social location is not determined solely by race. Instead race – as it intersects with class and gender among other categories of identity and inequality – works simultaneously to situate her within overlapping societal systems (for example, racism, classism, and sexism) of privilege and oppression.⁷² Because, as Andersen and Collins argue, race, class, and gender are social, not static, categories, “their form – and their interrelationship – changes over time,” allowing for the possibility of social change.⁷³ This means that Horne's identity is fluid and historically contingent, “constantly being transformed by political struggle.”⁷⁴ While the field of sociology is significant for its theorization of identity markers as social constructs, I find the “interdiscipline” of performance studies exceedingly useful for its conceptualization of identity – race, class, and gender – as performative.⁷⁵

Judith Butler's influential theory of gender identity as a “performative accomplishment” rather than an “essence” or biological datum, challenges the notion of gender as “a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed.”⁷⁶ Instead, Butler conceives gender

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, 7th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010), ix, 1, 62.

⁷² Andersen and Taylor, *Sociology*, 255.

⁷³ Andersen and Collins, *Race, Class, and Gender*, 63.

⁷⁴ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 55.

⁷⁵ E. Patrick Johnson, “Foreword: The Journey from Bourgeois to Boogie” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie: Black Middle-Class Performances*, eds. Vershawn Ashanti Young and Bridget Harris Tsemo, xiii-xxii (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), xx.

⁷⁶ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 154-166 (New York: Routledge, 2006), 155, 157.

as “an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*.”⁷⁷ Applying Butler’s work to racial identity, several scholars – Kimberly Benston, Nicole Hodges Persley, E. Patrick Johnson, Fred Moten, and Vershawn Ashanti Young, among them – argue for conceptualizing race, in particular, “blackness,” as “contingent, malleable, performative,” rather than a biological fact.⁷⁸ “Blackness,” Benston suggests, “is not an inevitable object, but rather a motivated, constructed, corrosive, and productive process.”⁷⁹

As E. Patrick Johnson contends, “‘blackness’ does not belong to any one individual or group. Rather, individuals or groups *appropriate* this complex and nuanced racial signifier in order to circumscribe its boundaries or to exclude other individuals or groups.”⁸⁰ Similarly, Nicole Hodges Persley argues the importance of differentiating *black people* from *blackness*, defining blackness as “performative codes of African American identity” – such as styles of language, self-adornment, embodied gesture, and political identification – which “can be separated from black people and can be performed by those who are racially black and those [who] are not.”⁸¹ Therefore, performing blackness is different from living “black” – or “the inexpressible yet undeniable racial experience of black people.”⁸² In making this claim for separating blackness from black people, Hodges Persley is suggesting that the everyday experiences of living as a black person in the United States engender these “normative” performative codes that signify African American identity.⁸³ In other words, as performance

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷⁸ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 29.

⁷⁹ Kimberly W. Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 6.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 2.

⁸¹ Nicole Hodges [Persley], “Sampling Blackness: Performing African Americanness in Hip-Hop Theater and Performance” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2009), vii, 4, 30.

⁸² Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 8-9.

⁸³ Hodges [Persley], “Sampling Blackness,” 56, 10-11, 30.

artist and theorist Bryant Keith Alexander proposes, blackness ““references those perceived repetitive actions performed by black people.””⁸⁴

Both Johnson and Hodges Persley highlight the importance of understanding the “multiplicity” and “multicentricity” of blackness as well as the need to consider the ways other identity markers affect its performance.⁸⁵ We must understand gender, race, and class (and their intersection) as performative accomplishments. Johnson and Vershawn Ashanti Young each point to the significance of theorizing class as socioeconomic status as well as “artifice” *and* of understanding class performativity’s interrelationship with conceptualizations of blackness.⁸⁶ Despite the harsh realities of class inequality, socioeconomic status alone insufficiently defines class. “As I have argued about blackness,” writes Johnson, “class...is not the exclusive property of any one group.”⁸⁷ As Johnson suggests, people of one economic position may appropriate and enact those repetitive actions associated with the class performance of another economic position.⁸⁸ Therefore, I take into account the overlapping and cumulative character of performative identity markers (race, class, and gender) in order to adequately assess Horne’s identity performances.

Lena Horne’s Postwar Autobiographical Performances

Packaging Horne as its first black glamour girl, MGM afforded her the glamorizing on-screen treatment previously reserved for its white female stars. As Tara Prescott notes, “The word ‘glamour’ is usually aligned with commodity, materiality, fantasy and Hollywood. For

⁸⁴ Bryant Keith Alexander quoted in Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 8.

⁸⁵ Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 19; Hodges [Persley], “Sampling Blackness,” 7, 30.

⁸⁶ Johnson, “Foreword” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, xx; also see Vershawn Ashanti Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 1-38.

⁸⁷ Johnson, “Foreword” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, xx.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

most [people], the word has links to the frivolous world of fashion and consumerism.”⁸⁹ In addition to signifying luxury, wealth, and femininity, Hollywood glamour signified whiteness. In creating a glamour girl, MGM transformed its actress – through “a process of stereotyping” – into a “dream factory manufactured object.”⁹⁰ As Ruth Amossy suggests, the Hollywood glamour girl “is frozen in her Olympian role and asked to embody [a] godlike creature.”⁹¹ By attempting to fit Horne within this existing dream-factory template, Hollywood placed her in an awkward position; her on-screen representation – when coupled with her singing style, often described as “white” – suggested that Horne was more white than black.⁹² Furthermore, glamour, as Judith Brown argues, is “a negative aesthetic” – “cold” and “indifferent.”⁹³ As she suggests, classic Hollywood represented the white glamour girl as “beyond human” – as a “perfect, mediated image without the messy implications of human subjectivity.”⁹⁴ MGM cast Horne in this mold of “the coolly beautifully coiffed personality, hovering over the multiple indignities of life on the ground.”⁹⁵ By representing Horne as its black glamour girl, Hollywood denied her the messiness of human subjectivity. It implied that Horne lived in a world of frivolity, privilege, and material success, apparently hovering over the racism affecting the majority of African Americans “on the ground.”

⁸⁹ Tara Prescott, “Gazing into the Gorgeous Abyss: Judith Brown’s *Glamour in Six Dimensions*,” review of *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form*, by Judith Brown, *Journal of Modern Literature* 34 (Summer 2011): 189.

⁹⁰ Ruth Amossy, “Autobiographies of Movie Stars: Presentation of Self and Its Strategies,” *Poetics Today* 7, no. 4 (1986), 677, 676.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 677.

⁹² As Richard Dyer suggests, Horne “is closer in sound to white singers such as Irene Dunne, Gertrude Lawrence or Helen Morgan than to contemporaneous black singers like Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald or Ivie Anderson.” Despite “Horne’s position as a woman who could pass for white, vocally as well as visually,” he argues, she “self-consciously incorporates elements of black musical tradition into her performance without merely abandoning the white ones. Neither black nor white traditions of popular music in the USA have ever been sealed off from one another; however, at any given moment, some styles and modes were thought to be white and others black; Horne never exclusively occupied either.” Dyer, “Singing Prettily,” loc. 2763-67, 2830-34.

⁹³ Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

As Hodges Persley rightly argues, “there is no ‘authentic’ way to ‘be’ black.”⁹⁶ Still, throughout African American history, competing factions have attempted to delineate definitions of “authentic” blackness in an effort to simultaneously validate their particular political, social, and cultural agenda and undermine those conceptions of blackness that challenge it.⁹⁷ “Because the concept of blackness has no essence,” argues Johnson, “‘black authenticity’ is overdetermined – contingent on the historical, social, and political terms of its production.”⁹⁸ As Johnson, Ashanti Young, and J. Martin FAVOR illuminate, past and present debates concerning “authentic” blackness often reflect class tensions within black communities – with “authentic” and politicized blackness associated with working-class African Americans; by rendering the black working class custodians of “genuine” blackness, the black middle class is inevitably constructed as inauthentic, “race-fake,” and apolitical.⁹⁹ Additionally, the dominant culture perpetuates a “fantasy wherein race marks class” –with middle-class status associated with whiteness and blackness associated with lower-class status.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, those African Americans who perform middle-classness are often accused of “performing out of racial character, acting white” and betraying the race.¹⁰¹ Because of this discourse linking “authentic” blackness to working-class African Americans, Horne’s performance of middle-classness and Hollywood’s representation of her as a glamour girl, called her racial performance – her racial

⁹⁶ Hodges [Persley], “Sampling Blackness,” 9.

⁹⁷ Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁹ Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 22; Young, *Your Average Nigga*, loc. 97-102; J. Martin FAVOR, *Authentic Blackness: The Folk and the New Negro Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 4.

¹⁰⁰ Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 16.

¹⁰¹ Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 37n33; Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 23.

“authenticity” – into question; she appears “phenotypically black but politically and ideologically white.”¹⁰²

As Ruth Amossy argues, the female film star may neither ignore, nor ever completely escape, her artificial Hollywood prototype.¹⁰³ Consequently, the Hollywood star often turns to self-representation as a means of taking control of her image and challenging the system that has objectified her as “a mere commodity manufactured by a specialized industry.”¹⁰⁴ Hollywood’s representation of Horne as one of the “beautiful people” evokes a world of fantasy “utterly removed from the daily lives of average people.”¹⁰⁵ As Stephen Gundle suggests, “The realm of glamour is a universe inhabited by the very wealthy, the talented, the beautiful, the famous, and the lucky.”¹⁰⁶ Apparently enjoying the spoils of glamour and honorary whiteness, the rhetoric of racial “authenticity” suggests Horne’s Hollywood “prototype” is racially inauthentic and apolitical. As a result, Horne became burdened and, some might say, obsessed, with trying to prove her blackness – what Ashanti Young has described as the burden of performing racial authenticity.¹⁰⁷

In this dissertation, I argue that Lena Horne spent much of her life negotiating, appropriating, and challenging her Hollywood-manufactured image – with its connotations of whiteness and racial inauthenticity – by constructing autobiographical personas meant to enact “authentic” blackness for black audiences, who as scholar Nellie Y. McKay suggests, often

¹⁰² Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 24. Although many of Horne’s spectators read her as “phenotypically black,” many others, as several scholars note, read her as phenotypically white. See, for example, hooks, *Black Looks*, 119 and Dyer, “Singing Prettily,” loc. 2721-22

¹⁰³ Amossy, “Autobiographies of Movie Stars,” 678, 694.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 679.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Gundle, *Glamour: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Young, *Your Average Nigga*, loc. 198-99, 248-53; Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 32; Regester, *African American Actresses*, 174-175.

“expected militant political narrators in black autobiography.”¹⁰⁸ I contend that Horne attempted to display her “authentic” blackness through racially conscious self-representations as a “radical” black woman and her performance of identity-based, protest politics. In *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, scholars Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard include among “radical black women” those who “proved a long-distance runner” in the struggle for black freedom; “embraced a range of strategies” for resisting oppression; and “traversed a host of movements.”¹⁰⁹ Of course, Horne is, in many ways, unlike the black female activists discussed in *Want to Start a Revolution?* As a professional cross-over performer, her “militancy” is constrained by a white-controlled entertainment industry and her predominantly white audience. Consequently, Horne often adopted a strategy of keeping her radicalism “hidden in plain sight,” a strategy shared by many of the women discussed in *Want to Start a Revolution?*¹¹⁰

Recognizing that any discussion of “radical” black protest is relative, I draw on the work of sociologist Herbert H. Haines, who outlines “how the nature of black ‘militancy’ or ‘radicalism’ has changed over the years,” to assess Horne’s autobiographical performances as they relate to the “traditional” realm of civil rights politics.¹¹¹ At the same time, I, like scholar Robin D.G. Kelley, believe we must “break away from traditional notions of politics” as well as notions of “‘authentic’ movements and strategies of resistance” if we are to understand the “diverse struggles waged by black [Americans] during the twentieth century.”¹¹² Therefore, I also highlight “strategies of resistance” enacted by Horne through autobiographical performance

¹⁰⁸ Nellie Y. McKay, “The Narrative Self: Race, Politics, and Culture in Black American Women’s Autobiography” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 103.

¹⁰⁹ Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard, editors, *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹¹ Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 16.

¹¹² Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 4.

that move beyond the “traditional” realm of politics. Moreover, as McKay argues, black women’s narratives are in and of themselves “as politically significant as more overt modes of protest.”¹¹³

Since “*autobiographical acts of narration, situated in historical time and cultural place, deploy discourses of identity to organize acts of remembering that are directed to multiple addresses or readers,*” as Smith and Watson argue, “it is possible for narrators to produce, multiple, widely divergent stories from one experiential history, as many...autobiographers writing ‘serial lives’ have done.”¹¹⁴ In “Performing Lena,” I argue that Horne’s “successive versions” of her enacted personal narrative reflect shifting constructions of “authentic” blackness and black “radicalism.”¹¹⁵ With these concepts constantly in flux as a result of political struggle, Horne engages in “serial self-representation,” fashioning her self-image in relation to contemporaneous definitions of “authentic,” politicized blackness.¹¹⁶

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one, *Lena’s Voice: Performing Activism, Speaking Autobiographically*, considers Lena Horne’s formerly unexamined personal opinion column, titled “From Me to You” (1947-1948), in the radical black newspaper *The People’s Voice*. The chapter also analyzes Horne’s previously unexplored Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) file, recently released under the Freedom of Information Act, following Horne’s death in 2010. In this chapter, I argue that Horne – viewed primarily as Hollywood’s black glamour girl – fashioned a militant activist persona through autobiographical speeches at political protests covered by the black press and in her weekly installments of “From Me to You.” In an effort to challenge her

¹¹³ McKay, “The Narrative Self” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, 105.

¹¹⁴ Smith and Watson, “Introduction” in *Interfaces*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 16; Smith and Watson, “Introduction” in *Interfaces*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Smith and Watson, “Introduction” in *Interfaces*, 7.

Hollywood-manufactured image as an apolitical black star, Horne self-represented as an activist mother and citizen, who drew on her personal experiences to critique intersecting postwar oppressions. During the late 1940s, Horne spoke, wrote, and worked on behalf of radical political organizations, including the Council on African Affairs (CAA), the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of Arts, Sciences, and Professions (HICCASP), and the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA), which included members of the American Communist Party (CPUSA) among their supporters. As a result of Horne's radical persona, the FBI targeted the singer for surveillance as a possible CPUSA member or communist sympathizer.

The second chapter, "'Lena's Story Not a Fantasy': Performing Blackness in *In Person*," explores Horne's first full-length autobiography, co-written with Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss. In this chapter, I read the under-analyzed *In Person* as a mid-century autobiographical performance, in which Horne continues her postwar autobiographical project. Through *In Person*, Horne contests her Hollywood-constructed portrayal as a new type of African American entertainer – a glamorous, bourgeois black star, who achieves overnight acclaim by singing popular show tunes by white composers. This on-screen Horne appears untouched by racism and largely divorced from African American music, culture, and activism. In "Lena's Story Not a Fantasy," I argue that Horne uses *In Person* to self-construct a persona rooted in black resistance tactics – namely, the strategic performance of respectability politics onstage and off – long practiced by African American entertainers.

Chapter three, "Pretty in Pink?: Lena Horne and the Performance of Cold War Loyalty Ritual," explores Horne's enduring project of autobiographical self-fashioning within the limits of early 1950s American society. Represented in the conservative press as "un-American" – a Communist sympathizer – Horne attempted to construct a race-conscious persona separate from

Robeson and her other postwar political allies in order to maintain economic security and political acceptability within dominant cold war American culture. I argue that Horne's self-representational performances reflect the rapid rise of anticommunism and its effects on postwar progressives. In order to maintain her cultural legitimacy and financial viability, Horne adopted the stance of many civil rights liberals, performing anticommunism through public statements issued to national newspapers, "private" meetings with cold warriors, as well as an autobiographical clearance letter found in her FBI file.

In chapter four, "Making Up the Beauty Ambassador: Lena Horne Cosmetics and the Democratization of Black Beauty," I examine beauty icon Lena Horne's previously unstudied cosmetics venture, Lena Horne Cosmetics. Enjoined by black middle-class leaders to resume her symbolic role as a "colored glamour girl" and an ambassador of racial goodwill, Horne struggled to reimagine the glamour girl image she had sought to displace. During the 1950s and early 1960s, Horne appropriated this image, embracing the performance of black beauty, in order to fashion a persona as the spokeswoman for her own beauty line. Although seemingly apolitical or even counterpolitical, I argue that Horne's short-lived and previously unanalyzed beauty line reflects an extension of her postwar political ideals and, at the same time, the limitations she faced as an African American woman and former political progressive constrained by a repressive cold war culture. With her access to the "traditional" political arena restricted by a fervently anticommunist society, Horne sought to manipulate and liberate her glamour girl image to resist racism as well as to empower – socially, politically, and economically – herself and other black women.

In the final chapter, "Here's Lena Now," I analyze Horne's 1965 autobiography *Lena*, co-written with white author Richard Schickel, within the context of the civil rights movement.

Horne's *Lena* represents yet another attempt by the singer to refashion her persona in light of changing definitions of black radical protest and shifting definitions of blackness. Drawing heavily on E. Franklin Frazier's biting assessment of the black middle class in *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957), *Lena* constructs Horne as an African American woman estranged from the black masses as a consequence of her middle-class background, light skin color, and relative acceptance by white culture. Through *Lena*, Horne again seeks to challenge her image as a glamour girl, living a life of privilege far removed from racial discrimination, by self-representing as a victimized black woman, exploited throughout her life by both whites and blacks, who sought to use her as a pawn in their competing agendas. In this autobiographical performance, Horne asserts her personal transformation from alienated victim to an involved and angry civil rights activist united with her people in the struggle for racial equality. *Lena* represents Horne's efforts to revise her persona within the context of 1960s definitions of black militancy and African American identity.

While my future work will explore Horne's post-civil rights movement autobiographical performances, this dissertation focuses on the years 1945-1965 as a discrete period between the two moments for which she is most often remembered: her wartime Hollywood career and her civil rights era autobiographical performance in *Lena*. Moreover, as Richard Iton suggests, a silence surrounds the question of *how* politically progressive African Americans made the transition from postwar Robeson era politics to the civil rights era politics of the 1960s. This silence, he writes, has "the effect of marginalizing the intensity and significance of the earlier commitments [of this generation] to such an extent that, in many instances, they have simply been forgotten and rendered unremarkable and for all intents and purposes irretrievable. The maps that might help us trace the connections between the pre- and post-Robeson moments do

not exist.”¹¹⁷ By focusing on the years between 1945 and 1965, this dissertation works to break “the overpowering silence” surrounding this transition by tracing Horne’s self-fashioned, race-conscious personas from the Robeson era through the McCarthy period to the years of the civil rights movement, offering one map “that might help us trace the connections between the pre- and post-Robeson moments.”¹¹⁸

In this dissertation, I suggest that Horne’s determination to maintain her career as a “crossover” performer during the McCarthy era – and the difficulty of pursuing an overtly radical civil rights agenda while working within her profession – have largely obscured the intensity of her earlier political commitments. Despite the significance of Horne’s resistance politics, as Shane Vogel suggests in “Remembering Lena Horne,” a blog tribute to the deceased performer, “the Lena Horne that first comes to mind when we hear her name” is the iconic singer-actress, whose incomparable performance style, sophistication, beauty, and dignity, broke barriers in Hollywood, nightclubs, and Broadway. But, he argues, as we commemorate her passing, we must also remember the lesser known Lena Horne, “the Lena Horne who can teach us something about the long civil rights era in which we live still.”¹¹⁹ In many ways, this is “the Lena Horne,” the one “who can teach us something about the long civil rights era,” who I explore in this dissertation.

¹¹⁷ Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 61.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹⁹ Shane Vogel, “Remembering Lena Horne,” Social Text Blog, *Social Text*, June 4, 2010, available from <http://www.socialtextjournal.org/blog/2010/06/remembering-lena-horne.php> (accessed March 28, 2012).

CHAPTER 1
LENA'S VOICE
Performing Activism, Speaking Autobiographically

At the conclusion of World War II, Lena Horne was Hollywood's most famous black star, "widely publicized, [and] more glamorously [*sic*] built up than any other performer of her race."¹ That this same Lena Horne, known for her stunning looks and sophisticated song styling, posed a national security threat seems incongruous.² However, between 1946 and 1948, Horne used the black press to challenge her "frivolous" Hollywood-manufactured glamour girl image by fashioning a radical activist persona, rooted in her identities as a black mother and citizen; her weekly life-writing column in *The People's Voice*, described by scholar Alex Lubin as "an epicenter of left activity," was instrumental to this self-construction.³ For Horne, the black press offered a venue for enacting subjectivity and distancing herself from her dream factory constructed image as a racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized object meant to be seen and not heard. In an effort to distance herself from her on-screen characterization as a privileged, apolitical glamour girl, Horne primarily self-represented as an activist black citizen-mother, rather than as an entertainer, when speaking and writing about inequality alongside other prominent black radicals like W. E. B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson. As *Liberty* magazine's Frank Nugent noted, Horne's relationship with Robeson and her militant performance of race loyalty "made her almost a symbol to the new generation of Negroes, many of whom have referred to

¹ John M. Lee, "Is Lena Horne Fading as Box Office Attraction?" *Afro-American* (Baltimore), August 17, 1946, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore *Afro-American* (1893-1988).

² "Lena Horne," Federal Bureau of Investigation File 100-353031, *NYCity News Service*, September 30, 2010, available from http://nycitynewsservice.com/files/2010/09/FBI_LenaHorne.pdf (accessed November 6, 2010); Sherry Mazzocchi, "FBI Tracked Lena Horne's Activist Life," *NYCity News Service*, September 30, 2010, available from <http://nycitynewsservice.com/2010/09/30/fbi-tracked-lena-hornes-activist-life/> (accessed November 6, 2010).

³ Alex Lubin, "Introduction," in *Revising the Blueprint: Ann Petry and the Literary Left*, ed. Alex Lubin, 3-14 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 7.

her publicly as a feminine counterpart of Paul Robeson.”⁴ As a consequence of Horne’s political alliances with liberals, leftists, nationalists, and “prominent members” of the American Communist Party (CPUSA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) deemed Horne a potential threat to United States security. In October 1947, the FBI launched its investigation of Horne, hoping to determine her “background and activities in connection with the Communist Party.”⁵

Following World War II, Horne challenged Hollywood’s objectification through what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have called “self-representational acts.”⁶ Interviews with African American reporters and political speeches printed by the black press offered Horne powerful mediums for talking back to Hollywood and protesting its “controlling images.”⁷ In concert with the black press, Horne distanced herself from her on-screen representation as a “glittery glamour girl.”⁸ Rather than speaking and writing from her position as a famed entertainer, Horne, like many other African American women engaged in antiracist activism, evoked motherhood as a symbol of power, fashioning a political persona as a black citizen-mother to critique institutionalized racism and the injustices of American Jim Crow.⁹

In many ways, black newspapers and the fledgling *Ebony* magazine celebrated the political importance of the Hollywood-created Horne as a dominant construction acknowledging the beauty and respectability of black women. Despite Horne’s campaign to disavow “the dream

⁴ Frank Nugent, “Ten years ago she was a nobody, going nowhere. Today the lovely Lena Horne is one of our top entertainers. But you’ll never catch her whipping up spoon bread and spirituals in an Aunt Jemima rig, because She’s Nobody’s Mammy,” *Liberty*, April 7, 1945, 54; although this sobriquet signals recognition of Horne’s postwar resistance and her association with causes championed by Robeson, it is also problematic. Just as the white press’s reference to Horne as “the Negro Hedy Lamarr” reinforces the hegemonic construction of femininity as white, this designation of Horne as “the female Paul Robeson” reinforces the hegemonic construction of black politics as a masculine realm.

⁵ “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

⁶ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “Introduction: Mapping Women’s Self-Representation at Visual/Textual Interfaces” in *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance*, eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 1-46 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 15;

⁷ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), 69.

⁸ “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” *Ebony*, November 1947, 9.

⁹ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 192.

factory manufactured object,” the black press appropriated this image.¹⁰ Black newspapers, like the Baltimore *Afro-American*, claimed Lena Horne “exemplified” contemporary glamour and *Ebony* consistently ranked Horne at the top of its lists of “Most Beautiful Negro Women.”¹¹ Alluring portraits accompanied these stories. The black press objectified Horne in order to celebrate the dominant culture’s acknowledgement of a black woman as attractive. Although African American culture had long celebrated black pulchritude, the dominant culture historically excluded black women from definitions of respectable beauty, portraying them as asexual mummies or hypersexual prostitutes; in many ways, Hollywood’s Horne represented a break from this tradition. Although the black press honored Horne, it challenged the dominant culture’s implication that she was an exceptional beauty. Arguing “Lena Not the Only One,” the African American press celebrated numerous black “lovelies” through photography and beauty contests.¹² Still, most black institutions only endorsed as pretty those African American women, like Lena Horne, with light-skin, European features, straight hair, and ties to the black middle class. Therefore, despite challenging the racist beauty standards of the dominant culture, the black press reinforced inequalities based on class, gender, skin color, phenotype, and hair texture.¹³

¹⁰ Ruth Amossy, “Autobiographies of Movie Stars: Presentation of Self and Its Strategies,” *Poetics Today*, 7, no. 4 (1986), 676.

¹¹ “Today and Yesterday,” *Afro-American*, April 3, 1948, M5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988). See “Glamour is Global,” *Ebony*, July 1946, 19; “The Most Beautiful Negro Women in America,” *Ebony*, November 1949, 42-44.

¹² Lawrence F. LaMar, “Lena Horn [sic] as Carmen: Lena Not the Only One” *The Call* (Kansas City), March 10, 1944, 7; also see Megan E. Williams, “‘Lena Not the Only One’: Representations of Lena Horne and Etta Moten in *The Call*, 1941-1945” *American Studies* 51, no. 1-2 (2009): 5-23. On the importance of photography as “a powerful location for the construction of an oppositional black aesthetic,” see bell hooks, “In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life,” in *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*, ed. Deborah Willis (New York: The New Press, 1994), 46. On the significance of all-black beauty contests, see Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹³ In addition to Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen?*, see Marita Golden, *Don’t Play in the Sun: One Woman’s Journey Through the Color Complex* (New York: Doubleday, 2004); Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998); Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald

At the same time African American newspapers cheered Horne's status as a beauty on par with MGM's most glamorous white stars, it sought to deconstruct the "reel" Lena Horne by fashioning a "real" Lena Horne, a hard-working entertainer, dedicated mother, and committed citizen who "speaks out" on issues of discrimination.¹⁴ Still, the black press image of Horne, as one who speaks out on behalf of her race, often made light of her contributions to the civil rights struggle by infantilizing and objectifying the singer-actress. For example, *Amsterdam News* reporter Bill Chase describes Horne as "one girl who isn't afraid to talk when she isn't pleased about things, and one gets the impression...that she'll continue to speak out as long as she has a beautiful mouth to do so."¹⁵ By referring to Horne as a girl and fetishizing her "beautiful mouth," Chase at once reduces a thirty-year-old-woman to a child and an individual body part, subtly denying her subjectivity as a whole human being.¹⁶ Despite its objectification of Horne, the black press did afford the star an important popular venue for forging a persona that contrasted her clichéd Hollywood characterization.

Headlines announced "Lena Horne Dislikes Being Called 'Glamour Girl'" and "Lena Does More Than Look Pretty."¹⁷ The "real" Lena told *Ebony* and the *Chicago Defender* that she viewed glamour as "artificial," disliked the sobriquet of glamour girl, and detested donning the

Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Doubleday, 1992); and Susannah Walker, *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

¹⁴ "Meet the Real Lena Horne," *Ebony*, November 1947, 9-14; "Lena Horne Speaks Out," *People's Voice*, July 19, 1947, 22.

¹⁵ Bill Chase, "Lena Does More than Look Pretty: Flicker Star In All-Out Fight on Bias," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 12, 1947, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

¹⁶ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 238-239. Also see John Berger, "From Ways of Seeing" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, 37-39 (New York: Routledge, 2003) and Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, 44-52 (New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁷ Lena Horne as told to Al Monroe, "My Story," *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, May 24, 1947, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); Chase, "Lena Does More than Look Pretty," 11.

“tulle and spangles and pancake makeup” required to achieve this superficial beauty.¹⁸ *Ebony*’s representation of Horne reflects the tension between celebrating and deconstructing Horne’s glamorous image. In November 1945, African American publisher John H. Johnson introduced *Ebony*, a black popular magazine in the style of *Life*, aimed at a postwar, middle-class black audience. Johnson viewed *Ebony* as a vehicle for celebrating “the zesty side” of black life as well as the “deeds and accomplishments of Negroes” in America.¹⁹ *Ebony* touted Horne’s deeds and accomplishments, representing her as its ideal image of postwar black femininity.²⁰ The new magazine promised its growing readership articles that would go “behind the scenes” of the “camera-created” Horne to deliver the “Hollywood star in private life.”²¹ In March 1946, *Ebony* published its first Horne cover story, which argued, “there is a world of difference” between the “‘glamorous, exciting Lena Horne,’ as she’s called in press agents’ blurbs” and “the off-screen” Lena Horne.²² This Horne piece emphasized the contrivance of Hollywood by offering photographs of the star as she consulted with MGM stylists, discussed custom coiffures, sat for a studio make-up artist, and tried on beautiful gowns for her upcoming role in *Till Clouds Roll By*.²³

Ebony’s second Horne cover story is typical of the Hollywood star “autoportrait” featured in popular magazines.²⁴ As Ruth Amossy argues, “The reader who asks for the true story behind the glamorous image of the star also insists on getting the latter as well. If he is eager to see the true woman, it is because she is a Hollywood idol. He wants the dream factory manufactured

¹⁸ Horne as told to Monroe, “My Story,” 2; “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” 11.

¹⁹ “Backstage,” *Ebony*, November 1945, 2; “Backstage,” *Ebony*, December 1946, 4.

²⁰ See Megan E. Williams, “‘Meet the Real Lena Horne’: Representations of Lena Horne in *Ebony* Magazine, 1945-1949,” *Journal of American Studies*, 43, no. 1 (2009): 117-130; and Jacqueline Jones, “An *Ebony* Alternative to the White Feminine Mystique” in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 268-274.

²¹ “Lena Horne Begins New Movie,” *Ebony*, March 1946, 20; “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” 9.

²² “Lena Horne Begins New Movie,” 20.

²³ “Lena Horne Begins New Movie,” 17-19; “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” 11-12.

²⁴ Amossy, “Autobiographies of Movie Stars,” 676.

object as well as the real, intimate person.”²⁵ With “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” *Ebony* offers readers both Hornes, the Hollywood idol, and its version of the real, intimate Horne, described as a “personality who is relatively unknown to a vast audience of millions of movie, radio, and night club fans.”²⁶ The Lena Horne of the November 1947 *Ebony* cover is the dream factory manufactured object. Wearing a strapless dress and black gloves, *Ebony*’s cover girl is immaculately made-up and glamorously styled. Adorned in a diamond tiara, earrings, and bracelets, she suggests Hollywood opulence. As an autoportrait, “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” must promise devotees access to the true story behind this image, and *Ebony* promises to deliver its readers the “real” Lena “[b]ehind the lavish make-up, gay tinsel and brilliant glitter of America’s most popular Negro entertainer.”²⁷ Although the following feature story includes a glamour shot of Horne – “[d]ressed and made up for the spotlight” – like the one found on the magazine’s cover, the majority of the article is illustrated with “candid” photographs of Horne meant to suggest behind-the-scenes authenticity.²⁸ *Ebony*’s true, intimate Lena “sings an entirely different song from the sweet, pretty tunes she has done in some 15 pictures.”²⁹ The “real” Lena is portrayed as more concerned with the inequities facing “her race and the common folk everywhere” than with the trappings of femininity and success that shape her Hollywood image.³⁰ In concert with *Ebony*, “Meet the Real Lena Horne” provided Horne with a popular venue for fashioning an alternative image to that of the “sexy glamour girl.” Through *Ebony*, Horne shaped a “militant-minded” persona – as “a hard-fighting crusader for a better world” – rooted in her relationship with Paul Robeson and her identity as a black citizen-mother.³¹

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

In “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” Horne describes the importance of Robeson’s mentorship in inspiring her progressive activism, telling *Ebony*:

“I understand how those anti-white Negroes feel. I was that way the first half of my life. I hated my own people because I saw them pushed around and taking it. I hated whites for pushing them. But one night Paul Robeson came into Cafe Society where I was singing and that night changed my whole way of thinking – if I may say so, my whole life. He knew how mixed up and miserable I was and he took the trouble to talk to me a lot. I got some idea of the greatness of our people. I learned why they were being pushed around and how big a people we Negroes can be if we learn how to see things clearly and fight.”³²

In this interview, Horne constructs her growing race consciousness as a conversion narrative in which she experiences a “process of reeducation” under the tutelage of Robeson.³³ As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write, “This narrative mode is structured around a radical transformation from a faulty ‘before’ self to an enlightened ‘after’ self.”³⁴ Horne represents her faulty “before” self as a “bitter” person, prejudiced against whites and angry at blacks, who under the guidance of Robeson, becomes an enlightened “after” self, a fighter for social, political, and economic justice for all. A significant element of Horne’s self-fashioned postwar activist persona, Horne’s association with Robeson also contributed to the FBI’s decision to surveil the singer-actress.

The *Daily Worker*, a New York City paper representing the views of the American Communist Party and heavily monitored by federal investigators, previewed the above “November Ebony [*sic*] photo-profile” for its readers. Describing *Ebony*’s story as “cast[ing] aside the lavish tinsel and brilliant glitter of screen and cafe society to show America’s most popular Negro entertainer for the eloquent orator she really is,” the *Daily Worker* article, titled “Lena Horne Tells How Paul Robeson Changed Her Life,” uses Horne’s words to highlight Robeson’s role in her conversion from “violent anti-white Negro” to “fighter” against “race

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 192.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

hate” on both sides of the color line.³⁵ This article, along with other *Daily Worker* pieces mentioning the singer-activist, appears in Horne’s FBI dossier and is referenced as evidence that Horne, under the influence of “PAUL ROBESON, pro-Communist Negro singer,” was “sympathetic to the Communist cause” and “often cooperated with Communist groups if she believed that they were assisting in obtaining equality for the Negro people.”³⁶

Unaware of FBI surveillance, Horne aligned herself with Robeson, Du Bois, and other black anticolonial activists, who, as Penny Von Eschen argues, “forcefully argued that their struggles against Jim Crow were inextricably bound to the struggles of African and Asian peoples for independence.”³⁷ Contending that racism and race were historical constructions embedded in slavery and colonialism, the “avant-garde international left” of Robeson and Du Bois drew connections between the political, social, and economic realities facing African Americans and oppressed peoples across the globe.³⁸ By speaking autobiographically at rallies in support of domestic and international civil rights, anticolonialism, and organized labor alongside Robeson and Du Bois, Horne challenged her Hollywood image and styled an activist persona based in her experiences as a black citizen-mother.

Backed by the Council on African Affairs (CAA), Horne stood with Robeson, Du Bois, Benjamin J. Davis Jr., and Max Yergan in their call for ““united action of all democratic forces to achieve freedom for all colonial and subject peoples.””³⁹ Originally established in 1937 as International Committee on African Affairs (ICAA) and reorganized as the CAA in 1942, the Council advocated the decolonization of African nations through public education about African

³⁵ “Lena Horne Tells How Paul Robeson Changed Her Life,” *Daily Worker* (New York), October 7, 1947, 11, newspaper clipping in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

³⁶ “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

³⁷ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

issues, mass meetings, and political lobbying.⁴⁰ By 1945, the FBI had classified the CAA, the foremost African advocacy organization in the United States at that time, as a Communist organization and the CAA is listed as one of the “Communist influenced groups” Horne supported in its New York report on the activist-singer.⁴¹ Despite FBI investigation, the CAA, under the leadership of Paul Robeson, still remained a credible institution supported by an alliance of liberal and leftist Americans in 1946. That year, Horne joined the CAA’s South African famine relief campaign, which sought to raise funds and collect food “urgently needed” in the Ciskei region of South Africa.⁴²

As a member of the Sponsors Committee for South African Famine Relief, Horne united with Robeson, Du Bois, Davis, and Yergan, “in appealing to the American people for aid to the famine-stricken native people of South Africa and for the end of colonial exploitation of their ‘motherland.’”⁴³ The FBI tracked Horne’s involvement with the CAA, an organization it identified as a Communist front. Horne’s file documents her promotion of anticolonialism and famine aid alongside Paul Robeson at a CAA meeting held in Los Angeles on March 24, 1946. According to an FBI confidential informant, keynoters at the rally “denounced British imperialism, demanded relief from the U.S. Government for negroes [sic] in Africa, condemned American imperialism, protested against police brutality, and opposed a new world war.”⁴⁴

At the meeting, Horne spoke on behalf of starving South African mothers and their children, stating, “HERBERT HOOVER has an organization raising money to help poor starving people of Europe, but not one cent has been raised for the five million starving mothers of

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-18, 20.

⁴¹ Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: The New Press, 1989), 296-297; “Lena Horne,” Federal Bureau of Investigation File 100-353031.

⁴² “Horne, Robeson Support Plea for South Africa,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 25, 1946, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993); Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 65, 103-104.

⁴³ “Yergan Reports Aid On Way to Famine Victims,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 20, 1946, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); “Horne, Robeson Support Plea for South Africa,” 11.

⁴⁴ “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

Africa.”⁴⁵ In this speech, as in others from this period, Horne “employed maternalist discourse” and drew on her symbolic power as a mother within the black community to critique Western imperialism and South African oppression.⁴⁶ The attending FBI informant reported that the CAA meeting “followed the Communist Party line in all respects,” recounting Horne’s speech as evidence of his assessment.⁴⁷

The black press also followed the Robeson-Horne campaign. In covering one of Horne’s CAA-sponsored appearances, the *Amsterdam News* highlights her looks – whereas Paul Robeson is described as “celebrated,” Horne is referred to as “glamorous.”⁴⁸ At the same time, this comment highlights the politicization of Horne’s beauty as well as a minimizing of Horne’s contributions through her objectification. Horne’s appearances alongside Robeson, educating the public about the connections between European imperialism and the food shortage in South Africa, inspired the “Big 3 Unity for Colonial Freedom” rally. Described by historian Penny M. Von Eschen as “[o]ne of the most significant expressions of popular antiimperialism,” the rally drew nineteen thousand people to Madison Square Garden in New York City on June 6, 1946.⁴⁹ In press releases and at pre-rally meetings meant to inform labor and civil rights leaders of the food crisis, the CAA denounced South Africa’s fascist and racist land policy, which relegated four million black South Africans to thirteen percent of the land, as the cause of the famine.⁵⁰ Robeson drew connections between hunger, colonialism, and the possibility of international war, “condemn[ing] the imperialist forces who have stolen the wealth of Africa and the ‘conspiracy of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Megan Taylor Shockley, “We, Too, Are Americans”: *African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 104.

⁴⁷ “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

⁴⁸ “Horne, Robeson Support Plea for South Africa,” 11.

⁴⁹ “5000 Hear Robeson, Horne in Africa Plea,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 4, 1946, 21, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 65, 103.

⁵⁰ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 66.

silence' which keeps the American people in the dark about the plight of the African people."⁵¹

In contrast to Robeson's speech, Horne again rooted her pleas on behalf of famine relief in maternalist discourse. The *Amsterdam News* summarized Horne's role in the campaign for its readers, writing, "Miss Horne made a moving appeal for aid to the suffering mothers and children of the African people in South Africa, whose plight certain powerful people do not want to be known. But we shall tell their story until it is heard all over America, declared Miss Horne."⁵² During this period, Horne often cited her sense of responsibility toward her own children as a catalyst for her activism, but in speaking on behalf of South African mothers and their children, Horne, as feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins suggests, joins other black women who cite "a bond with all of the Black community's children" as inspiring their social activism.⁵³

In addition to Horne's work with the CAA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and black newspapers took notice of her involvement with the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of Arts, Sciences, and Professions (HICCASP). Described in Horne's FBI dossier as "a Communist front composed of Hollywood Communists and liberals," HICCASP challenged racial discrimination in the film capital.⁵⁴ Several black newspapers carried Hollywood reporter Harry Levette's coverage of an HICCASP-sponsored anti-lynching demonstration in California that featured Horne as the "principle speaker."⁵⁵ As Hill Collins suggests, "Because it can strike

⁵¹ "Horne, Robeson Support Plea for South Africa," 11.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 189, 191.

⁵⁴ "Horne," FBI File 100-353031; Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 62-63.

⁵⁵ Harry Levette, "Lena Horne Says No Mother's Children Safe in Calif. Rally," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 16, 1946, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); also see Harry Levette, "Lena Horne Joins Fight to Curb Barbarisms: No Mother's Child Safe Movie Star Tells Nation," *Afro-American*, August 24, 1946, 13, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

at random, violence is of special concern to Black mothers.”⁵⁶ By speaking out against lynching and other forms of racialized violence from the perspective of a mother, Horne takes on this special concern. According to Levette,

...she feelingly expressed apprehension for the safety of her own offspring, now numbering two, and the children of all Negro women because of the bold lynching of Negroes. ...During Miss Horne’s speech which she delivered with deep seriousness, she read a list of the recent lynchings, murders and other outrages against Negroes and commented: “When such things are going on I no longer feel that here is a place of refuge for us in the United States, unless these things can be stopped.”⁵⁷

Horne chose to speak from her role as a black mother in order to tackle the issue of racialized violence as well as to challenge the hypocrisy of United States’ self-representation as a democratic “land of the free.”

In the black press, Horne emphasized motherhood as politicizing. As Collins argues, “Motherhood...can be invoked as a symbol of power by African-American women,” because “much of U.S. Black women’s status in African-American communities stems from their activist mothering.”⁵⁸ *Ebony* reported that Horne’s “favorite out-of-the-spotlight role is a baby’s mama” and that her activism was largely motivated by this role and her desire “for a better world where her daughter Gail will never be called ‘Nigger.’”⁵⁹ By speaking as an African American mother, Horne taps into a tradition of black women’s activist mothering and the power and respect afforded black mothers by the larger black community. As Collins suggests of the black activist mother, “Certainly her actions can be seen as fighting for her own children. But she clearly understood that motherhood could be a symbol of power in that setting.”⁶⁰ Likewise, Megan Taylor Shockley argues that maternalist discourse proved central to black women’s postwar

⁵⁶ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 197.

⁵⁷ Levette, “Lena Horne Says No Mother’s Children Safe in Calif. Rally,” 6.

⁵⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 192.

⁵⁹ “Lena Horne Begins a New Movie,” 20; “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” 9, 12.

⁶⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 194.

activism as it “legitimize[d] their activities by claiming power within a traditional gendered sphere.”⁶¹

In addition to reporting on Horne’s involvement with the CAA and HICCASP, the black press covered extensively Lena Horne’s other postwar activism together with Robeson and Du Bois. The *Afro-American* reported that Horne along with Robeson, Du Bois, Albert Einstein, and Bartley Crum “issued a call for an American crusade to end lynching.”⁶² The planned crusade included a mass assembly in Washington D.C. on September 22 and 23, 1946, the commemoration of Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, to demand federal anti-lynching legislation and its enforcement.⁶³ The black press also touted Horne’s support of the United Negro and Allied Veterans of America, the DuSable Community Center of Chicago, and the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, an organization that “was leading the fight against the poll tax, and conducting vigorous get-out-the-vote campaign by teaching tens of thousands of whites and colored the dignity of the vote for the first time.”⁶⁴

In addition to these organizations, Horne was also active in the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA), a group of political independents organized in opposition to Truman’s domestic and foreign policies. An outgrowth of the Independent Citizens Committee of Arts, Sciences,

⁶¹ Shockley, “*We, Too, Are Americans*,” 109.

⁶² “Crusade Against Lynching Planned,” *Afro-American*, September 7, 1946, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

⁶³ “Crusade Against Lynching Planned,” 5; Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 306.

⁶⁴ “Artists to Join in Benefit for South,” *Afro-American*, August 24, 1946, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); Bill Chase, “Lena Does More Than Look Pretty: Flicker Star In All-Out Fight On Bias,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 12, 1947, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News. Also see “Lena Horne to Star at Party for SCHW,” *Afro-American*, July 12, 1947, 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); “Lena Horne To Be Guest of Honor At Benefit Lawn Party,” *New York Amsterdam News*, City Edition, July 12, 1947, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993); “Lena Horne To Be Honored,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 17, 1947, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); “Lena Horne Helps Launch Vets’ Drive,” *Afro-American*, July 19, 1947, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); “Lena Horne Feted At Lawn Party,” *New York Amsterdam News*, City Edition, July 26, 1947, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993); “Lena Horne On Benefit Bill” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, July 26, 1947, 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

and Professions (ICCASP) and the National Citizens Political Action Committee (NCPAC), Truman's former Secretary of Commerce and Roosevelt's Vice-President Henry A. Wallace led the PCA along with Vice-Chairman Paul Robeson. In January 1947, the Progressive Citizens of America announced its opposition to "discrimination, segregation and intolerance in any shape or form."⁶⁵ At home, the group advocated the rights of African Americans, veterans, labor, agriculture, and business. The PCA platform promoted equal health care, housing, and education for all and called for the elimination of "the so-called" House Un-American Activities Committee.⁶⁶ The Progressive Citizens of America also denounced Truman's foreign policy, especially the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan for European Recovery, for "inaugurating a program of American imperialism" and escalating U.S.-Soviet tensions by "dividing the world into two armed camps."⁶⁷ In the *Defender*, W. E. B. Du Bois praised the PCA's program, "endors[ing] it fully." He deemed the platform "of prime importance to American Negroes." In addition to supporting the PCA's stance on domestic issues, Du Bois also shared the group's "opposition to militarism and imperialism" and backed its call for "the stoppage of the manufacture of atomic bombs; the elimination of the stock piles of those bombs and the just and lasting peace."⁶⁸ *Ebony* pictured the "real" Horne stumping for Wallace with the caption: "Supporter of Wallace for President, Lena is active in the Progressive Citizens of America, here consults with PCA executive William Miller about Wallace speaking tour."⁶⁹ Horne worked

⁶⁵ "PCA's Political Action Program Aids Minority," *Afro-American*, January 11, 1947, 20, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); "Independents Form Political Group," *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, January 11, 1947, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

⁶⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Winds of Time," *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, March 1, 1947, 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

⁶⁷ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 107-108.

⁶⁸ Du Bois, "The Winds of Time," 15.

⁶⁹ "Meet the Real Lena Horne," 13.

alongside Wallace, Robeson, and Du Bois to implement the PCA's political platform, which the FBI deemed Communist influenced.⁷⁰

On September 11, 1948, Henry Wallace, Lena Horne, and Paul Robeson addressed a crowd of 25,000 "cheering listeners" at a PCA-sponsored "Progressive Counterattack" rally. Together, they denounced the Truman administration's foreign policy and called for "legislation ending Jim Crow in our nation once and for all."⁷¹ The black press reported that Wallace "attacked those who try to make communism an issue in the U.S." by labeling "every liberal idea" communist.⁷² Newspapers also relayed that Wallace, connecting the state of international affairs to ultraconservative domestic policies, denounced "the 'witch-hunting, labor-hating reactionaries who will be responsible for World War III.'"⁷³

Black newspapers also discussed Horne's role in the "Progressive Counterattack" rally, relaying that "Miss Horne...said she chose to appear as a citizen rather than 'in the role of entertainer.'"⁷⁴ The black press summarized Horne's speech, stating that the actress commended the Actors' Equity's fight to end segregation in Washington, D.C.'s Jim Crow theaters, but proscribed the discrimination that continued to pervade the country's capital.⁷⁵ Horne's oration – which she undervalued by describing as not "much of a speech, really, because I am not a

⁷⁰ "Horne," FBI File 100-353031.

⁷¹ "Wallace Hit Jim Crow Bias Toward Minorities: Progressive Citizens Holds New York Rally," *Atlanta Daily World*, September 13, 1947, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); "Speakers at 'Progressive' Rally," *Atlanta Daily World*, September 18, 1947, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003). See also, "Wallace, Robeson, Lena At PCA Meet," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 6, 1947, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

⁷² "25,000 Hear Wallace Urge Laws to End Segregation," 2; "Wallace Opens Fights On Jim Crow To Head Liberal's Counter-Attack," *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, September 20, 1947, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

⁷³ "Wallace Hits Racial Bias, 'Witch Hunts,'" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 18, 1947, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); "Wallace Hit Jim Crow Bias Toward Minorities," 1; "25,000 Hear Wallace Urge Laws to End Segregation," 2; "Wallace Opens Fight On Jim Crow To Head Liberal's Counter-Attack," 4.

⁷⁴ "Wallace Hit Jim Crow Bias Toward Minorities," 1; "25,000 Hear Wallace Urge Laws to End Segregation," 1; "Wallace Opens Fight On Jim Crow To Head Liberal's Counter-Attack," 1.

⁷⁵ "Wallace Hit Jim Crow Bias Toward Minorities," 1, 6.

speech-maker” but as “the little talk I gave” – tells of “the first time [she] visited Washington.”⁷⁶

Speaking autobiographically, Horne stated:

I was traveling as a singer with Noble Sissle’s band. ...the train pulled into the station, I stared in adoration at my first glimpse of those famous, clean-looking government buildings, and I was filled with awe as we picked up our bags, climbed out of our train and walked briskly into the depot. Naturally, we headed directly for the cab stand. I noticed a number of empty cabs which were rapidly filling up with white people. I saw too, that my people were threading their way through the heavy traffic, racing across the street in an attempt to get cabs there. Then I heard a woman say to a child who was about to open a cab door: ‘No son, those cabs won’t carry colored folks. We got to go outside and wait till a colored cab comes.’ This was my introduction to Washington.⁷⁷

In this speech, abridged in her *People’s Voice* column and in the Baltimore *Afro-American*, Horne employed “autobiographical strategies” to perform progressive politics and fashion her image.⁷⁸ First, by describing D.C. “as the scene of some of the bitterest experiences of [her] life” and presenting herself as an everyday citizen, who faces the indignities of segregation rather than a privileged entertainer, Horne highlights the hypocrisy of a racially segregated seat of democracy and challenges the notion that as a famed performer she escapes racism. Second, by placing a black mother and child at the center of this anecdote, Horne evokes her self-representation as “a baby’s mama,” linking herself to other black women who self-defined in gendered terms as activist mothers, who Shockley describes as, “working in the home and community to help future generations experience democracy, the American way of life.”⁷⁹

Committed to the causes she championed, Horne told *Ebony* that she would continue “speaking and singing at every rally and dance and political meeting I can to tell the people that

⁷⁶ Lena Horne, “From Me to You,” *People’s Voice*, September 20, 1947, 14.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Horne, “From Me to You,” September 20, 1947, 14; “Lena Horne Quotes AFRO in Address to 25,000,” *Afro-American*, September 20, 1947, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); Sidonie Smith, “Autobiographical Manifestos” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 433-440 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 433.

⁷⁹ “Lena Horne Begins a New Movie,” 20; Shockley, “We, Too, Are Americans,” 110.

we must fight.”⁸⁰ Although the mainstream black press afforded Horne a venue for performing activism, Horne expressed her frustration with the limits of this “conservative” forum, telling *Ebony*, ““I have almost given up on the Negro press. They don’t seem to get progressive about anything except racial matters.””⁸¹ For Horne, who espoused an intersectional analysis of oppression – suggesting that racism, classism, anti-Semitism, and imperialism are intertwined – *The People’s Voice* provided Horne a militant setting for highlighting these connections and further shaping her activist persona.⁸²

On July 19, 1947, Allan Morrison, the editor of the *People’s Voice* at that time, introduced a radical Lena Horne to the newspaper’s readers. The Horne of the *People’s Voice*, “hated the ‘glamor’ [*sic*] tag” and spoke out against misconceptions that fame shielded her from racism. She stated, “So-called successful Negroes are not immune to discrimination. Since my meager success, I’ve experienced as much discrimination as when I was an unknown.” Here Horne works to disavow the “lucky” and “privileged” Horne of Hollywood fantasy. This “Lena Horne is fighting mad.” Morrison illuminates:

She’s mad at ‘the wholesale denial of democracy to America’s Negro minority, at Hollywood’s suppression of Negro talent and its libeling of Negro people through screen stereotypes. She’s mad at the southern bloc in Congress which has fought down legislative safeguards of Negro rights and at the Republican majority responsible for the Taft-Hartley labor law. She’s blazing mad at warmongering politicians and the whole let’s-have-a-war-with-Russia school of thought. Lena says she’s been mad at injustice for a long time but admits that her emotional fury was often misspent and ill-directed.

Morrison described Horne’s words before a small group that included fellow activist-performer Paul Robeson and “little Gail, her 9-year-old daughter,” at a New York City cafe. Alongside the article, the *People’s Voice* announced that Horne would contribute a weekly column, a forum for

⁸⁰ “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” 9.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸² On the intersection of racism and anti-Semitism, see Horne’s interviews with the *Amsterdam News* and *Ebony*. Bill Chase, “Lena Does More than Look Pretty,” 11; and “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” 12.

voicing “her emotional fury” and anger at injustice, to the newspaper. The *Voice* advertised that Horne’s first column, along with Robeson’s new byline, would appear in the subsequent issue. Morrison’s article highlights many of the topics – the effects of Jim Crow in the entertainment industry, the legislative attack on labor, the impending cold war, and the Communist ““witch-hunt going on among the progressives”” – and organizations – the Progressive Citizens of America, the United Negro and Allied Veterans of American, and the Southern Conference for Human Welfare – Horne would discuss in her life-writing column. The article also describes a “deeply moved” Robeson’s support of Horne’s political commitment and sincerity; Morrison quotes Robeson as imparting, ““I want to say this about Lena: no other Negro artist I know has as deep a feeling about the injustices suffered by the Negro people nor realizes so strongly the necessity for righting these injustices.”” By linking Horne with Robeson, “whose fame as a singer hardly exceeds his reputation as a fighter for the rights of his people,” Morrison legitimates Horne’s radical activist persona and endorses her new *Voice* column.⁸³

Founded in 1942 by Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., the first black New York City councilman, the radical African American newspaper the *People’s Voice* sought to “at all times serve all people.”⁸⁴ Powell envisioned the *Voice* as a newspaper unlike the sensationalist *New York Amsterdam News*; he viewed the *People’s Voice* as a forum for advancing black civic education as well as for staging his own political ambitions.⁸⁵ With its editorial policy, the *Voice* announced its intent to serve all readers, “[w]hether they be Jew or Gentile, black or white, Catholic or Protestant, theist or atheist.” At the same time, the newspaper promised to give

⁸³ Allan Morrison, “Actress Fights for Democracy: Ol’ Man Jimcro Irritates Lena,” *People’s Voice*, July 19, 1947, 22.

⁸⁴ “Editorial Policy of the Voice,” *People’s Voice*, August 22, 1942, 4, quoted in Rachel Rubin and James Smethurst, “Ann Petry’s ‘New Mirror,’” in *Revising the Blueprint: Ann Petry and the Literary Left*, edited by Alex Lubin, 15-34 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 24.

⁸⁵ Finding aid for *People’s Voice* research and editorial files (Collection 3086), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, available from <http://www.hsp.org/files/findingaid3086peoplesvoice.pdf> (accessed January 13, 2011).

special attention – “not only ‘the last full measure of devotion’ but the first as well” – to the needs of black communities.⁸⁶ The *People’s Voice* offered local, national, and global coverage, focusing on political and labor issues specific to Harlem as well as struggles against racism and colonialism in the United States and Africa. Powell, along with National Negro Congress (NNC) president Hope Stevens, National Maritime Union (NMU) vice-president Ferdinand Smith, and Executive Director of the Council on African Affairs (CAA) Max Yergan, comprised the newspaper’s board.⁸⁷ In addition to Powell, contributors included art director Ollie Harrington, photographer Morgan Smith, reporter Maude B. Richardson, and southern correspondent Esther Cooper, as well as columnists W. E. B. Du Bois, Ann Petry, and Fredi Washington. Du Bois’s “Pan Africa” covered African issues, drawing connections between Africans and black Americans, between imperialism and racism; initially, a map of the continent illustrated “Pan Africa.”⁸⁸ Petry contributed “The Lighter Side,” a politicized version of the “gossip column” targeting Harlem society women, and Washington covered entertainment in “Headlines–Footlights.”⁸⁹

On July 26, 1947, the front page of the *Voice* featured the first installment of Horne’s column beneath Paul Robeson’s new line, “Plain Talk,” which he viewed as a platform for “sharing observations, reactions, opinions – at a time when our country plays an historic role in the shaping of the world...and at a time when the latent power of the Negro people...can be of

⁸⁶ “Editorial Policy of the Voice,” quoted in Rubin and Smethurst, “Ann Petry’s ‘New Mirror,’” 24.

⁸⁷ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2005), 322; Gerald Horne, *Black Liberation/Red Scare: Ben Davis and the Communist Party* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 183; and Rubin and Smethurst, “Ann Petry’s ‘New Mirror,’” 24.

⁸⁸ Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (New York: State University of New York Press 1986), 272.

⁸⁹ Rubin and Smethurst, “Ann Petry’s ‘New Mirror,’” 26; Jeanna Penn, “Film Industry,” *Black Women in America*, 2nd edition, edited by Darlene Clark Hine, Oxford African American Studies Center, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/opr/t0003/e0139> (accessed February 22, 2011).

deepest importance and influence.”⁹⁰ Addressing her readers, Horne said that she viewed her column as a place to discuss “some of the thoughts and hopes I have for my people.”⁹¹ Horne’s column, titled “From Me to You,” would run alongside Robeson’s “Plain Talk” and W. E. B. Du Bois’s “Pan-Africa” weekly until January 10, 1948. Although “From Me to You” sounds more like the title of a Tin Pan Alley love song Horne might sing onscreen than a political, life-writing column critiquing civil rights abuses at home and abroad, the title reflects the notion that the Lena Horne of the *Voice*, unlike the Lena Horne of Hollywood film, is unmediated, with the column representing Horne’s direct relationship with her readers.

Denied a speaking voice in her film performances and largely silenced on issues of racial discrimination by the white press, Lena Horne challenged her “reel” image as established by Hollywood, fashioning an activist persona through her weekly column in the *Voice*. Throughout the brief run of “From Me to You,” Horne critically analyzed the treatment of African Americans in Europe vis-à-vis America, censured the United States for its Jim Crow and anti-labor laws, condemned the “un-American methods” of the House on Un-American Activities Committee, and denounced the participation of “our government” in the escalation of “a ‘cold war.’”⁹² At the same time, she consistently espoused her belief “that the republican form of government is the best framework for democracy ever devised” and empowered her readers to take action to better her native country.⁹³

⁹⁰ Paul Robeson, “Plain Talk: What Harlem Means to Me,” *People’s Voice*, July 26, 1947, 1, 14.

⁹¹ Lena Horne, “From Me to You: I’m Glad I’m In Show Business,” *People’s Voice*, July 26, 1947, 1.

⁹² Lena Horne, “From Me to You,” *People’s Voice*, September 6, 1947; Lena Horne, “From Me to You: Christmas is Time of Joy,” *People’s Voice*, December 27, 1947, 18.

⁹³ Lena Horne, “From Me to You: London Enjoys Great Wedding,” *People’s Voice*, November 29, 1947, 18.

As Horne travelled Europe in late 1947, performing for British and French audiences, she compared “contacts with Old Man Jimcro...under the slogan of ‘democracy’” to the “general absence of racial prejudice” in Europe.⁹⁴ She writes:

I could not help contrasting our reception by the English people with the kind of reception we get in certain parts of our own country, Mississippi and Georgia, for example. The English are courteous, kindly, considerate and respectful of one’s human rights. In our own Southland we are treated with hostility and contempt. Isn’t it ironical that I should have to come to a foreign country to enjoy equal treatment and freedom from repression and racial insult?⁹⁵

By juxtaposing her “reception” in London and Paris as “an adopted citizen” with her treatment “like an alien” in her native country, Horne critiques the hypocrisy of American “freedom” and “‘democracy.’”⁹⁶

“From Me to You” offered Horne a powerful platform for performing civil rights activism. At the commencement of 1948, Horne wrote, “I feel that the coming year will be a crucial one in our history, both domestically and internationally, and that the course of world history will be directly affected by the policies this nation pursues.” In her column, she sought to empower her readers, arguing, “We, the people, can have a lot to say about those policies and about the direction in which our country moves.” In “resolving to work harder to make our country truly the ‘land of the free,’” she promoted the abolition of the poll tax; the passage of a federal anti-lynching law and “a strong Fair Employment Practice law by Congress”; the “continued opening of the gates...of sports to Negro athletes”; the “broadening of opportunities for Negro actors...and the creation of more dignified Negro roles”; as well as the desegregation of the armed forces, public accommodations, and residential areas.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Lena Horne, “From Me to You: Paris, London Here I Come,” *People’s Voice*, October 25, 1947, 14.

⁹⁵ Lena Horne, “From Me to You: England Not So Merrie Now,” *People’s Voice*, November 8, 1947, 14.

⁹⁶ Lena Horne, “From Me to You: Salute to the British People,” *People’s Voice*, November 15, 1947, 14.

⁹⁷ Lena Horne, “From Me to You: What We Need Most in 1948,” *People’s Voice*, January 3, 1948, 14.

Horne also wrote on behalf of labor and against “the bullying, un-American methods” of the House Un-American Activities Committee.⁹⁸ She called for the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Law, which mandated the submission of non-Communist affidavits by all labor unions wanting to use the National Labor Relations Board’s collective-bargaining procedures.⁹⁹ Horne described the Taft-Hartley Law as representative of “the gravest attempt in our history to shackle the trade union movement.”¹⁰⁰ In several installments of “From Me to You,” Horne censured the House Un-American Activities and its “intimidation of honest progressive writers, directors, and actors.”¹⁰¹

Horne condemned the Thomas Un-American Activities Committee for its “conviction” of Howard Fast because of his work with the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee. Describing Fast as a “fighter” and “one of America’s greatest people’s writers,” Horne wrote, “I think it’s an indictment of our own democracy when a great artist like Howard Fast is persecuted because of his viewpoint.”¹⁰² Horne expressed increasing concern as she witnessed HUAC’s “attack on progressives in the movie industry,” viewing the investigation as a “crisis for the democratic forces in the theatre and in American cultural life generally.”¹⁰³

In a prescient column, Horne explained the dangers of “this witch-hunt” and unintentionally presaged her own future red-baiting as an entertainer who “[spoke] up for labor, peace, and Negro rights.” As she traveled internationally for the first time, from the United States to Europe, she wrote:

I’m troubled about the state of freedom back there in the country I’ve just left. I’m troubled about the current attack on progressives in the movie industry that has been launched by the House Un-American

⁹⁸ Lena Horne, “From Me to You,” *People’s Voice*, September 6, 1947, 14.

⁹⁹ Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 322.

¹⁰⁰ Horne, “From Me to You: What We Need Most in 1948,” 14.

¹⁰¹ Lena Horne, “From Me to You: Thoughts in Mid-Atlantic,” *People’s Voice*, November 1, 1947, 14.

¹⁰² Lena Horne, “From Me to You,” *People’s Voice*, September 6, 1947, 14.

¹⁰³ Lena Horne, “From Me to You: Thoughts in Mid-Atlantic,” 14.

Activities Committee. ...there is immediate danger that this hysteria will force many of our most promising artists into retreat or at least quiescence. There's danger too, now rapidly becoming a reality, that the movie industry will conduct its own 'loyalty check,' and seek to 'purge' itself of all writers, directors, producers and actors who have the guts and real Americanism to stand up and speak up for labor, peace and Negro rights. This is the threat which must be fought now if America is to have a free screen and a free theatre. For if the American people allow agencies like the Un-American Activities Committee to dictate the content of movies and plays, a long step towards totalitarian thought control will have been taken. I happen to know many of Hollywood's progressives who are under smear attack. [...They] are all staunch believers in racial equality and the progressive integration of the Negro in our society.¹⁰⁴

In addition to criticizing the anticommunist hysteria perpetrated by HUAC at home, Horne condemned Truman's "'cold war' against Soviet Russia" in her *Voice* column.¹⁰⁵

In the Christmas installment of "From Me to You," Horne juxtaposes "the principles of Christianity and freedom" with the realities of American foreign policy. She writes, "I have heard the war drums beating and the sound of marching troops. The 'cold war' is rapidly getting warmer. Will a 'hot war' engulf us all [before] another Christmas arrives?"¹⁰⁶ Despite Horne's consistent criticisms of U.S. domestic and foreign policy both at home and as she travelled abroad, she used "From Me to You" to articulate her love of America and the promise of democracy.¹⁰⁷ As she traveled England, a socialist monarchy, Horne expressed the belief that "the republican form of government is the best framework for democracy ever devised."¹⁰⁸ Acknowledging "the opposition we will face" and the "long, tough, uphill battle" for freedom,

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Lena Horne, "From Me to You: Henry Wallace Does It Again," *People's Voice*, January 10, 1948, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Lena Horne, "From Me to You: Christmas is Time of Joy," *People's Voice*, December 27, 1947, 18.

¹⁰⁷ Horne, "From Me to You: London Enjoys Great Wedding," 18; Lena Horne, "From Me to You: What Jackie Means to Us," *People's Voice*, October 11, 1947, 14; Lena Horne, "From Me to You: Real Hope for U.S. Football," *People's Voice*, October 18, 1947, 14; Lena Horne, "From Me to You: A Yank Abroad Gets Homesick," *People's Voice*, December 13, 1947, 18; Lena Horne, "From Me to You: Goodbyes Are Always Hard," *People's Voice*, December 20, 1947, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Horne, "From Me to You: London Enjoys Great Wedding," 18.

Horne still espoused the belief that racism could “be licked,” American democracy attained, and world peace achieved through the use of “our own voices and actions.”¹⁰⁹

Despite Horne’s championing of democracy, the FBI carefully monitored “From Me to You,” summarizing her columns in her dossier, and her involvement with the “Communist influenced” *People’s Voice*.¹¹⁰ Characterized by Powell as “the ‘Lenox Avenue’ edition of the Communist *Daily Worker*,” several of the *Voice*’s staff identified as black Communists, including general manager Doxey Wilkerson, acting managing editor Marvel Cooke, Ferdinand Smith, and Fredi Washington.¹¹¹ Additionally, the *Voice* highlighted the political views of Communist Party leader Benjamin Jefferson Davis Jr., elected New York City councilman in 1943 and 1945, who frequently contributed columns to the paper.¹¹² Following Powell’s departure from Harlem for Congress in 1944, Max Yergan, described by scholar David H. Anthony III, as a “stalwart member of American left-wing politics and an advocate of Communist principles,” and Denton J. Brooks, Jr., previously of the *Chicago Defender*, assumed leadership of the *Voice*.¹¹³ Despite its “Red” reputation, Rachel Rubin and James Smethurst argue that *People’s Voice* is best understood as “the newspaper of record for activities on the

¹⁰⁹ Horne, “From Me to You: What We Need Most In 1948,” 14; Horne, “From Me to You: Real Hope for U.S. Football,” 14; Horne, “From Me to You: Christmas is Time of Joy,” 18.

¹¹⁰ “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹¹¹ Yvette Walker, “Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.,” *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Paul Finkelman, Oxford African American Studies Center, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/opr/t0005/e0983> (accessed January 12, 2011); Rachel Peterson, “The *People’s Voice*: A Progressive African American Press Confronts the Cold War,” abstract for paper presented at the annual American Studies Association, Hyatt Regency, Albuquerque, New Mexico, October 16, 2008, available from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p244935_index.html (accessed November 11, 2011); and Rubin and Smethurst, “Ann Petry’s ‘New Mirror,’” 24.

¹¹² Will Haygood, *King of the Cats: The Life And Times of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 147; Rubin and Smethurst, “Ann Petry’s ‘New Mirror,’” 24; Gerald Horne, “Benjamin Jefferson Davis,” *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/opr/t0001/e0691> (accessed February 21, 2011).

¹¹³ Finding aid for *People’s Voice* research and editorial files; David H. Anthony III, “Max Yergan,” *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/opr/t0001/e2430> (accessed January 12, 2011).

black Left in New York, covering not only the work of the Communist Left, but also the work of non- (and even anti-) Communist radicals.”¹¹⁴

In 1947, Yergan, now an “anti-Communist ideologue,” launched a campaign to rid *People’s Voice* of Communist influence and to challenge the authority of Doxey Wilkerson and Marvel Cooke.¹¹⁵ That year the newspaper’s board fired Wilkerson, Cooke, and Fredi Washington.¹¹⁶ In the *Daily Worker*, the ousted Wilkerson condemned the ideological turn of the newspaper, writing:

Here was a genuine ‘people’s paper,’ militantly fighting for the rights of Negro people and of organized labor. ...This was The People’s Voice [sic] of old, whose growing influence and prestige served to mobilize and guide the Negro people in vigorous struggles for full democratic rights, and to strengthen their ties with progressive allies in the white population. ...But that PV has just about ceased to exist. Its three main columnists – Paul Robeson, Lena Horne and W.E.B. Du Bois – still write as fearless and consistent champions of progress. But the editorial policy of THE PEOPLE’S VOICE of today is moving along quite a different path – one which can lead only to the betrayal of the basic interests of the Negro people and the alienation of its progressive white and Negro readers.¹¹⁷

The above column, written by a known CPUSA member, branded the *Voice* “a [sic] Uncle Tom paper.”¹¹⁸ It drew the attention of the FBI for its “denunciation of the present policy of the PEOPLE’S VOICE,” which the Bureau identified as “tending away from the left and away from Communist influence,” and for its mention of Horne as a “holdoff” from Wilkerson’s tenure.¹¹⁹ “Although no formal announcement was made” by the *Voice*, the black press reported that Horne

¹¹⁴ Rubin and Smethurst, “Ann Petry’s ‘New Mirror,’” 24.

¹¹⁵ On Max Yergan’s changing politics see Anthony, “Max Yergan.” Also see Rachel Peterson on Yergan’s “anti-communist crusade” against Party members on the staff of *People’s Voice* in Rachel Peterson, “Invisible Hands at Work: Domestic Service and Meritocracy in Ann Petry’s Novels,” in *Revising the Blueprint: Ann Petry and the Literary Left*, ed. Alex Lubin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 77.

¹¹⁶ Marvel Cooke reported that she “recruited Washington into the Communist Party.” See Cheryl Black, “Marvel Jackson Cooke,” *African American National Biography*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/opr/t0001/e1353> (accessed January 13, 2011).

¹¹⁷ Doxey A. Wilkerson, “What’s Happening to ‘Peoples Voice’?” *Daily Worker*, December 18, 1947, 2.

¹¹⁸ “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

and Robeson “quit their featured spots suddenly during the policy controversy involving Dr. Max Yergan and Doxey Wilkerson” in early 1948.¹²⁰ Shortly after, the newspaper ceased publication as a result of red-baiting and financial problems.¹²¹

Ultimately, the Bureau’s bicoastal investigation “fail[ed] to reflect actual Communist Party membership in [New York City] on the part of HORNE” and found “no evidence [in Los Angeles that] subject actually member of CP.”¹²² Nonetheless, anticommunists scrutinized her politics and past beginning in November 1947. The *Afro-American*’s Alice Dunningan reported that John Steele, when interviewed by the House Un-American Activities Committee, named Lena Horne “as being in some way connected with so-called communist front organizations,” but that Lela Rogers, mother of movie star Ginger Rogers and co-founder of the anti-Communist Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, “would not comment, however on her opinion of Lena Horne.”¹²³ On the other hand, black conservative George S. Schuyler, *Pittsburgh Courier* editor, reamed “Lovely Lena” for “Toe[ing] the Line” in an article appearing in the magazine *Plain Talk* and included in Horne’s FBI dossier.

Characterized by the FBI as “a prominent anti-Communist Negro writer,” George S. Schuyler named “the beauteous” Lena Horne, “night club and film chanteuse and idol of Aframerica,” the “latest recruit to the Red ranks.” Citing Horne’s conversion narrative in *Ebony*’s “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” Schuyler represented Paul Robeson as a “singing propagandist for communism,” who “has been singularly successful in wooing Negro singers, dancers, and actors into the Red fold.” Of Robeson, Schuyler writes, “He is an expert in adding

¹²⁰ “Lena, Paul Quit,” *Afro-American*, January 31, 1948, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); Lena Horne, Paul Robeson Quit As Columnists,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 4, 1948, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

¹²¹ Finding aid for *People’s Voice* research and editorial files.

¹²² “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹²³ Alice Dunningan, “Colored Movie Stars Described as Good Americans at Red Probe,” *Afro-American*, November 8, 1947, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

to the confusion of politically ignorant Negro artists who are already as ‘mixed up’ as Miss Horne.”¹²⁴ Here Schuyler draws on prevalent postwar discourse linking communism with contagion and specifically the notion that Robeson “had [this] contagious, corrupting effect” on those African Americans who were “mixed up.”¹²⁵ Schuyler concludes his article with the following statements:

[T]here can be no doubt that our Russian Firsters consider [Lena Horne] a great “find”; destined to lure many celebrity-worshippers into aiding the Comintern’s program. Finally, it is ironical that such darlings of the capitalists as Lena Horne and Paul Robeson – who have been accorded recognition, honors, and opportunities such as few white artists of equal or superior talents have enjoyed – should succumb to the Red rumble-bumble about “race hatred” and the hand that fed them. That’s gratitude!¹²⁶

As one of the most famous black Americans of the era, “accorded recognition, honors, and opportunities” Horne’s critiques of U.S. racism, “witch hunts,” and foreign policy threatened to undercut “the official [cold war] narrative of race and American democracy” as one of progress.¹²⁷ Horne’s increasingly militant autobiographical persona – entrenched in her self-representation as a radical black citizen-mother – and her vocal denunciation of the United States’ postwar policies concerning both domestic and international race relations ultimately belied this national narrative.

¹²⁴ George S. Schuyler, “Lovely Lena Toes the Line,” *Plain Talk*, November 1947, quoted in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹²⁵ Tony Perucci, “The Red Mask of Sanity: Paul Robeson, HUAC, and the Sound of Cold War Performance,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 53 (Winter 2009): 36.

¹²⁶ Schuyler, “Lovely Lena Toes the Line,” in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹²⁷ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15.

CHAPTER 2
“LENA’S STORY NOT A FANTASY”
Performing Blackness in *In Person*

Despite, or perhaps because of, Horne’s postwar leftist activism, MGM continued to represent Lena Horne as Hollywood’s “‘colored glamour girl’” in her final films under contract – *Words and Music* (1948) and *Duchess of Idaho* (1950).¹ In these films, Horne again performed her signature specialty acts. She appears elegantly gowned, coiffed, and staged, singing show tunes for white cabaret-goers. Again, kowtowing to Southern bigotry, Horne’s numbers remained extraneous to the plot. In *Words and Music*, a biopic loosely based on the lives of Broadway composer Richard Rodgers and his partner, lyricist Lorenz Hart, Horne performs “Where or When” and “The Lady is a Tramp” for the film’s white nightclubbers in a posh cabaret scene. Wearing a high-necked and full-skirted white “party dress,” accented with pink and lavender flowers, Horne sported her new fashionable pageboy haircut, styled with complementary lavender ribbons.² As Horne biographer James Gavin notes, she looked as if she had stepped out of “a prom-girl fantasy.”³ The aura of “fantasy” surrounding Horne is further highlighted by the film’s contrasting treatment of its only other black character Mary, Hart’s maid, played by Marietta Canty. As Charlene Regester points out, “This maid figure seems a strategically devised reinforcement of the subservient status assumed by African Americans.”⁴ When juxtaposed with the representation of Mary as a domestic, Horne’s star-treatment suggests, in the words of one

¹ Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, *In Person: Lena Horne* (New York: Greenberg, 1950), 231.

² “Lena Horne in New Movie: One of the Stars in MGM’s Technicolor ‘Words and Music,’ She Sings, Dances,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), January 29, 1949, B3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

³ James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne* (New York: Atria Books, 2009), 203.

⁴ Charlene Regester, *African American Actresses: The Struggle for Visibility, 1900-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 203.

black spectator, that the singer-actress “has everything. Charm, glamour – such natural good looks. And even a voice.”⁵ Similarly, *Duchess of Idaho* features Horne performing for a white audience. As the emcee announces, “Ladies and gentlemen, *Miss Lena Horne!*,” the audience claps enthusiastically. Looking gorgeous in a long-sleeved, white satin blouse paired with a full-length, silvery-blue chiffon skirt, Horne emerges onstage framed by golden sheers. The spotlight hits Horne as the applause subsides; she sings “Baby, Come Out of the Clouds” as she descends a flight of silver stairs and then floats elegantly across a silver stage.

Despite Horne’s efforts to challenge her now clichéd image as a singing glamour girl, countless film spectators continued to view Horne in terms of her film construction as “the glamorized Lena.”⁶ Her portrayal as an overnight Hollywood sensation suggested “dreams come true.”⁷ Consequently, many black movie-goers thought “beauteous Lena Horne’s climb [to fame] as something as exotic and fantastic as the magic carpet.”⁸ As a Hollywood-perfected representation of herself – constructed by make-up artists, costumers, hair dressers, and directors to dazzle, fascinate, and seduce audiences – Horne appears to exist within a fantasy world far from everyday life as lived by the majority of African Americans.⁹ On MGM’s pedestal, Horne seemed both unscathed and unconcerned by the racism facing most African Americans on a daily basis. Moreover, as a Hollywood star, who looked like a “sun-tanned white” glamour girl, known for singing show tunes “like a white girl” for white audiences, Horne’s image raised questions

⁵ Delores Calvin, “Lena Can’t Dance, But She’s Great in Musical,” *Afro-American*, January 15, 1949, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

⁶ P.L. Prattis, “The Horizon: Lena Horne Life Story Is the Book To Give for Christmas,” review of *In Person*, by Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, *Courier*, November 18, 1950, B18, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002).

⁷ Stephen Gundle, *Glamour: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

⁸ “Lena’s Story Not a Fantasy,” review of *In Person: Lena Horne* by Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, *Afro-American*, January 6, 1951, 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

⁹ Gundle, *Glamour*, 3-5.

concerning her racial “authenticity.”¹⁰ The Hollywood Horne appeared “to be performing out of racial character, acting white.”¹¹ Seemingly disconnected from “authentic” black musical styles – defined as blues and jazz – and apparently unanchored from black performance traditions, the Hollywood-manufactured Horne *seemed* racially “inauthentic.”

In an effort to “speak back to dominant culture” and “prove her blackness” to her African American audience, Horne worked alongside collaborators Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss to tell her “own story” in a full-length autobiography titled *In Person* (1950).¹² In this chapter, I argue that *In Person* acts as a “site of performed ‘blackness,’” in which Horne attempts to assert her racial “authenticity” by situating her seemingly “inauthentic” performance persona within protest strategies entrenched in racial uplift movements and traditionally practiced by black performance artists.¹³ These protest traditions enacted by black entertainers included contesting racist onstage representations of African Americans by performing black respectability offstage; challenging onstage stereotypes by performing black respectability onstage and offstage; and challenging racism in the entertainment industry and the larger society, often through

¹⁰ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 147.

¹¹ Vershawn Ashanti Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie: Black Middle-Class Performances*, eds. Vershawn Ashanti Young and Bridget Harris Tsemo, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 37n33.

¹² Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 12; Vershawn Ashanti Young, *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*, kindle ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), loc. 198-99, 248-53; Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 32. Between November 1950 and May 1951, Johnson Publishing Company’s new *Tan Confessions* magazine serialized Horne, Arstein, and Moss’s *In Person*. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue, “While readers cannot resolve either the psychodynamic or the politics of collaborative life writing, several questions arise about the *terms of collaboration*.” See Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 178. Promoted as an “as-told-to” narrative, *In Person* presents Horne as the autobiographical speaker throughout, with the exception of a brief, four-paragraph introduction to the text signed by Arstein and Moss. Although *In Person*’s representation of Horne’s life narrative is consistent with Horne’s self-construction in her “My Story” (*Chicago Defender*, May 1947), her “Meet the Real Lena Horne” interview (*Ebony*, November 1947), and “My Life Story” (*True Confessions*, April 1949), she later claims it is an inauthentic and unauthorized portrayal in a 1953 letter to red-baiter Ray Brewer. I discuss Horne’s revised autobiographical performance, as found in this 1953 letter, in its historical context in the following chapter. Because *In Person* reflects Horne’s self-representation in several other preceding autobiographical performances, I view the autobiography as indicative of Horne’s preferred self-construction at the moment of collaboration and treat it as such throughout this chapter.

¹³ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 7.

participation in civil rights organizations. At the same time, Horne challenges her “fantastic” Hollywood portrayal as an overnight success story by outlining her experiences with those forms of prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalized racism particular to African Americans in the entertainment profession. According to one writer, who titled his review “Lena’s Life Not a Fantasy,” *In Person* ultimately succeeded in expressing “[Horne’s] long and at times most disappointing struggle for success.”¹⁴ Ultimately, with *In Person*, Horne attempts to fashion an “authentically” black performance and activist persona steeped in the history of black expressive culture and its specific protest practices.

Lena’s Story: *In Person*

During this period, Lena Horne worked to talk back to her Hollywood image and talk to her audience in a series of published life-stories. In May 1947, Horne told “My Story” to Al Monroe, theater editor of the *Chicago Defender*, in three installments. *True Confessions* published “My Life Story” by Lena Horne in April 1949; *Negro Digest* reprinted the piece in July 1949. Horne’s autobiographical storytelling culminated in her 1950 autobiography *In Person: Lena Horne*, as told to Carlton Moss, African American writer of *The Negro Soldier* (1944), and his white colleague Helen Arstein. Described as “the first record of the experiences of a top flight colored star in the theater,” the fledgling *Tan Confessions* serialized *In Person* as “Lena Horne’s Own Story” in seven parts between November 1950 and May 1951.¹⁵

Described by Horne biographer James Gavin as “a pretty pink volume,” the cover of *In Person: Lena Horne* features a black-and-white photograph of the star; the image is signed “Best Wishes, Lena Horne.”¹⁶ The image, surrounded by a pale pink border, depicts a smiling Horne;

¹⁴ “Lena’s Story Not a Fantasy,” 9.

¹⁵ Rufus Wells, “Moss Unmasks Hollywood: Calls FEPC Law Only Hope for Movie Jobs,” *Afro-American*, June 3, 1950, 1-2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

¹⁶ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 229.

her hair is styled in a sleek updo and she wears a ruffled, strapless gown. A heart-shaped pendent hangs from a velvet ribbon around her neck and pearl-embellished bow-shaped baubles accent her ears. As a whole, *In Person* reflects the contradictions embodied by Horne's image. The outward appearance of the book replicates the "reel" Lena, "the godlike creature manufactured by the dream factory."¹⁷ It suggests beauty, femininity, success, wealth, happiness, and fantasy. In contrast, the text of *In Person* represents Horne's counter-performance; like most star autobiographies, it is "supposed to reveal a true-to-life personality," the "authentic" Lena, distinct from her stereotyped Hollywood image.¹⁸ Rather than reading *In Person*, along with "My Story," "My Own Story," and "Lena Horne's Own Story," as offering access to the "real" Lena Horne, these texts are best read as period-specific "textual performances" of identity, Horne's attempts to fashion an "authentically" black persona in contrast to her on-screen representation.¹⁹

From the first page, *In Person* highlights the connections between Horne's Hollywood-created image, fan reception, and Horne's desire to reveal for her audience the "person" behind the dominant image. The book opens with a "curtain raiser" – a fan letter from the mother of a star-struck black daughter named "Josephine," *à la* La Baker. In many ways, this letter acts as a précis of Horne's following autobiographical performance. Only fifteen, Josephine, who "can sing and dance" and "has [Horne's] color," dreams of leaving school to become a stage actress. The fan letter foreshadows the experiences of *In Person*'s textual Horne, who "plead[s]" with her Mother to allow her to quit school and look for a job "on the stage" to "tide [them] over"

¹⁷ Ruth Amossy, "Autobiographies of Movie Stars: Presentation of Self and Its Strategies," *Poetics Today* 7, no. 4 (1986), 677.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 675.

¹⁹ Kathy Ogren, "'Jazz Isn't Just Me': Jazz Autobiographies as Performance Personas," in *Jazz in Mind: Essays on the History and Meanings of Jazz*, eds. Reginald T. Buckner and Steven Weiland, 112-127 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 112.

financially during “those lean months” of the Great Depression.²⁰ Josephine’s mother writes, “I would like to keep her in school, but frankly Miss Horne, we need the money. Everybody says she can make big money on the stage – specially if she gets to be a big star like you. I’d like to know how you got to where you are.”²¹

Describing this correspondence as “typical” of Horne’s copious fan mail, Arstein and Moss present *In Person* as Horne’s “answer to Josephine’s mother – and the thousands of others who look to her as the one Negro who has managed, they know not how, to achieve the pinnacle of Hollywood stardom.”²² This letter sets the stage for the following autobiography, in which Horne expands upon earlier press performances of her life.

In Person elaborates upon “My Life Story,” published in *True Confessions* and *Negro Digest*. In “My Life Story,” Horne constructs herself as a young woman, like *In Person*’s Josephine with a “girlhood dream” of becoming a famed performer.²³ Although she has seemingly achieved this dream, with appearances in numerous Hollywood films, Horne represents her career path as tumultuous and her film career as stifled by the racism and colorism that pervade the entertainment industry.

“Has My [Girlhood] Dream Come True?”²⁴

The majority of *In Person* and much of the earlier *Defender* piece take pains to outline and racially authenticate Horne’s performance style for a black readership. During the 1920s, the Harlem literati fostered a connection between “blues-singing, dark-skinned black women” and black authenticity, fashioning blueswomen as “the organic intellectuals of an authentic southern constituency” and “‘light-skinned’ chorus girls and variety hall crooners” as inauthentic,

²⁰ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 35-36.

²¹ Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, “Curtain Raiser,” preface to Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*), i.

²² *Ibid.*.

²³ Lena Horne “My Life Story,” *Negro Digest*, July 1949, 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

culturally contaminated by white influence and northern urbanity.²⁵ In many ways, *In Person* and the earlier “My Story” reflect Horne’s anxieties surrounding this “staged antagonism between the (dark-skinned) representatives of a southern-based black constituency and the (light-skinned) representatives of a citified, white-influenced, middle-class audience.”²⁶ For Horne, this “staged antagonism,” which equates dark skin and singing the blues with racial authenticity, is further exacerbated by her representation as a Hollywood glamour girl with all of its connotations of whiteness. Represented as a Hollywood-manufactured glamour girl, who, “[u]nlike most Negro chanteuses,” did not sing “authentic” blues and, unlike most black Hollywood actresses, did not play domestics, Horne worked to validate her racial authenticity by contextualizing her performance style within past black performance strategies and traditions of racial uplift.²⁷

In order to challenge those who characterized her as a Hollywood-creation, Horne locates her first dream – her “desire to become an actress” – in her childhood relationship with her actress-mother and her performance style within a legacy of “[b]alancing aesthetic passion with clear and purposeful commitments to racial uplift.”²⁸ She outlines a pre-Hollywood career history for her audience, including her performances with the “beauty chorus” of the “Old Cotton Club,” Noble Sissle’s all-black orchestra, Lew Leslie’s *Blackbirds of 1939*, and culminating with her first foray into film acting in order to situate herself within the rich history of performing respectability and racial uplift onstage and off.²⁹

She writes that her interest in performing is inspired by “visits back stage at the old Lafayette Theatre when my mother, [Edna Scotttron Horne], was a member of the Lafayette

²⁵ Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 195-196.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁷ “Chocolate Cream Chanteuse,” *Time*, January 4, 1943, 62.

²⁸ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 21; Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 282.

²⁹ Lena Horne as told to Al Monroe, “My Story,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, May 24, 1947, 1-2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

Players,” a black theater company descended from “the Williams & Walker, and Cole & Johnson companies before them.”³⁰ In her analysis of turn-of-the-century African American performers, including Bert Williams and George Walker, Karen Sotiropoulos argues that black vaudevillians “envisioned themselves as race leaders,” engaged in a politics of racial uplift through their offstage performances of respectability.³¹ Many African Americans viewed respectability and uplift politics as the keys to racial advancement. They believed that the everyday performance of middle-class values and etiquette, when paired with collective protest and social-service work, would prove their humanity to white America and facilitate their access to full citizenship.³² Although elite black subscribers to uplift politics judged vaudeville a disreputable form of entertainment, black stage performers felt their popularity among white audiences and their status as race representatives positioned them as race leaders with the potential to alter pervasive black stereotypes through their offstage comportment.³³ As African American performers entertaining racist audiences, who associated blackness with primitivism and indecency and whiteness with civilization and respectability, black vaudevillians attempted to divorce their onstage characters from their offstage self-presentations as respectable theater professionals.³⁴ As Sotiropoulos suggests, “Throughout their careers, they hoped that white America would embrace them as professional actors playing stage types, and that such acceptance would lead to the inclusion of African Americans in the body politic.”³⁵ In this way, the uplift strategies practiced by black vaudevillians mirrored those practiced by middle-class African Americans.³⁶

³⁰ Horne and Monroe, “My Story,” May 24, 1947, 2; Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 8.

³¹ Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2, 8.

³² *Ibid.*, 164-165.

³³ *Ibid.*, 164-165, 7-8, 10, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9, 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

Likewise, Paula Marie Seniors argues that the vaudeville team of Bob Cole, J. Rosamond Johnson, and James Weldon Johnson “actively worked to ‘become leaders and helpers of their race’ through music and theater.”³⁷ Using “the stage as a tool of uplift,” Cole and Johnson worked with black female actresses, notably Ada Overton Walker and Abbie Mitchell, to glorify black women as respectable ladies onstage.³⁸ In addition to promoting respectability and uplift politics through their onstage roles, Overton Walker and Mitchell worked offstage to challenge stereotypes of professional black actresses; through newspaper articles linking theater and black female respectability, Overton Walker and Mitchell worked to uplift their profession.³⁹ In addition performing respectability onstage as actresses portraying dignified characters and offstage as theater professionals, both Mitchell and Overton Walker extended their protest beyond the theatrical realm as clubwomen working for civil rights through organizations like the National Council of Negro Women.⁴⁰

Abbie Mitchell, as Paula Marie Seniors suggests, “imagined the theater as a place of dignity and respect for black women” and she continued to promote uplift and respectability politics through her work with the Lafayette Players in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴¹ Horne’ describes the Lafayette Players as “an extremely serious [black theatre] company,” invoking the names of the Lafayette’s great stars – including Mitchell, Andrew Bishop, Lawrence Criner, Edna Thomas, Frank Wilson, Clarence Muse, Evelyn Ellis, and Laura Bowman – in order to position herself as a successor of African American artists who performed respectability onstage and

³⁷ Paula Marie Seniors, *Beyond Lift Every Voice and Sing: The Culture of Uplift, Identity, and Politics in Black Musical Theater* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009), 4

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6, 8, 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6, 185.

offstage.⁴² She represents this troupe as comprised of hardworking and dedicated actors who, in the face of discriminatory wages, traveling conditions, and accommodations, sought “to prove that Negroes can achieve the finest artistry” and “that Negroes need not be confined to minstrel language” through their performances.⁴³ According to Horne, the Lafayette Players “cast Mama in ingénue roles” that challenged stereotypes of black women as hypersexual jezebels and asexual mammies.⁴⁴ Auto-representing as “a Negro ingénue,” Horne fashions herself as both her mother’s familial and theatrical descendant.⁴⁵

In *In Person*, Horne represents her decision to quit school to join the “‘Tall, Tan & Terrific’” chorus at the Cotton Club as rooted in both financial necessity and her “girlhood dream” of performing onstage.⁴⁶ The white-owned Cotton Club, described by Horne as an “exotic, jungle-like café,” featured all-black shows for white clientele and a late show performed to mixed audiences.⁴⁷ Horne depicts the shows as having “a primitive naked quality that was supposed to make a civilized audience lose its inhibitions. ...The dances were eloquently provocative.... In addition, there were ‘shake numbers’ by specialty dancers, risqué songs, and minstrel comedy sketches.”⁴⁸ The textual Horne suggests that her offstage performance of respectability, like black vaudevillians before her, countered these onstage performances of black female sexuality as animalistic. Describing herself as “terribly ignorant,” sexually inexperienced, and constantly “chaperoned” by her mother, Horne counters representations linking “the light-skinned showgirl” to “urban pleasures and freedoms” as well as “white privilege of access and

⁴² Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 8; Lena Horne as told to Al Monroe, “My Story,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, May 17, 1947, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

⁴³ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 53, 142, 148, 174.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*.

immoral desire.”⁴⁹ By differentiating between their stage performances of minstrel-jungle types and their offstage image as respectable citizens, African American performers, like Horne, challenged stereotyping and the logic of racial essentialism.

Performing respectability offstage and onstage acted as another black performance strategy for achieving racial uplift and integration. Horne represents her experience as the featured singer with Noble Sissle’s Orchestra as fitting within this approach to black performance. Horne portrays Sissle’s attempts to counter dominant stereotypes of African Americans through his black orchestra’s performances of respectability on and off the stage for white audiences. Horne highlights the role Sissle played in shaping her persona “as a performer and an ambassador.”⁵⁰ She writes:

Mr. Sissle taught me that there was a great deal more behind his insistence on “perfection” than merely respect for our craft. He felt that because we were constantly before the public, we had a remarkable opportunity, not only to improve conditions for ourselves, but to advance our entire race. According to this Ambassador of Good Will Theory, every one of us in the theatre had a duty to all our people. We were to remember during every waking moment that we were on exhibit and that we must keep our conduct above reproach. ...He believed that it was very important to carry this impression of Negroes as people of breeding and good taste to places where colored people had never been seen before.⁵¹

Many middle-class African Americans, like Sissle, believed that the mores and values they shared with middle-class whites acted as a foundation for communicating with white America and achieving integration.⁵² According to Horne, Sissle crafted the first version of Horne’s bourgeois “ingénue” image in hopes of presenting her to white spectators as a black woman of

⁴⁹ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 38, 42; Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 195.

⁵⁰ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 79.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁵² Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 196.

“breeding and good taste.”⁵³ By representing Sissle as the creator of her image, not MGM, Horne positions herself within black, rather than white, performance traditions.⁵⁴

Similarly, Horne challenges the notion that she is a “new type” of black female performer by referencing her theatrical predecessors. She mentions the sensational Adelaide Hall, who earned fame on “the musical comedy stage.”⁵⁵ Hall, captain of the Cotton Club chorus in the 1920s and “a vocalist renowned for her lush, sophisticated song styling,” performed in *Shuffle Along* (1921), *Runnin Wild* (1923) and Lew Leslie’s *Blackbirds* (1928).⁵⁶ Horne acknowledges the significance of the groundbreaking performers – such as Rose McClendon, known as the “Negro first lady of the dramatic stage” and the winner of the *Morning Telegraph* “Acting Award for her artistry in *In Abraham’s Bosom*” (1926) – whose achievements predated hers.⁵⁷ She references stylized performances of Gertrude Saunders, Ethel Waters, Ada Ward, and Josephine Baker as chorus girls in the all-black *Shuffle Along* and *Blackbirds* revues as well as Fredi Washington in the role of Peola in *Imitation of Life* (1934) as significant actresses who paved the way for her own success.⁵⁸

In particular, Horne draws connections between herself and Florence Mills. Remembered as “the outstanding Black woman in American musical comedy during the Jazz Age and the most popular personality in Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance,” Mills starred in Noble

⁵³ Horne refers to her image as the “ingénue type” several times throughout her autobiography. See Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 142, 148, 174.

⁵⁴ Also see Horne, “My Life Story,” 7-8.

⁵⁵ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 32.

⁵⁶ Daphne Duval Harrison, “Adelaide Hall,” *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Teborg-Penn, I, A-L (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 515.

⁵⁷ Annetta Jefferson, “Rose McClendon,” *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Teborg-Penn, II, M-Z (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 765; Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 34.

⁵⁸ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 32, 34, 37, 53-54, 113.

Sissle and Eubie Blake's *Shuffle Along* (1921) and Lew Leslie's first *Blackbirds* revue (1926).⁵⁹ As Jayna Brown suggests, at the height of her fame Mills represented "the New Black Woman – urban, emancipated, cultivated, traveling abroad to represent the black cultural capital and the mobility of its people. One reason she remained a loved figure for black people in the United States is that she consistently asserted her race belonging."⁶⁰ In addition to singing with Sissle, Horne – like Mills – worked with Lew Leslie as the star of *Blackbirds of 1939*. Horne suggests that Leslie "was pouring all his energy, all his ability, all his knowledge into taking unknown, ignorant little Lena Horne and developing her so she could replace Florence Mills."⁶¹ Horne pays homage to Mills as an activist-entertainer, noting, "I found, too, that she had been an active worker in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and in similar organizations."⁶² Here, Horne works to situate herself as a professional descendant of Mills's onstage performance strategies as well as of her "outspoken race loyalty" offstage.⁶³

"My start in movies came, not with M-G-M, as so many think," Horne writes, "but in one of the early Million Dollar Studio Flickers, 'The Duke Is Tops.'"⁶⁴ *The Duke Is Tops* (1938) featured Horne as Ethel Andrews, the female lead, opposite Ralph Cooper as Duke Davis. Known as "the Dark Gable," light-skinned Cooper co-founded Million Dollar Productions, a movie company that produced "race movies" for distribution to black movie-houses.⁶⁵ From the late 1910s to the 1950s, "race movies," independently produced films featuring all-black casts, offered black theater audiences alternatives to those stereotypical images of African Americans

⁵⁹ Richard Newman, "Florence Mills," *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Teborg-Penn, II, M-Z (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 798.

⁶⁰ Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 245.

⁶¹ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 124.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶³ Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 240; Horne alludes to Mills throughout her autobiography, see Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 32, 48-49, 53, 70-71, 113, 130, 120-122, 124, 137.

⁶⁴ Horne and Monroe, "My Story," May 24, 1947, 2.

⁶⁵ Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* (New York: One World Ballantine Books, 2005), 165.

disseminated by Hollywood. Race movies produced films that mirrored Hollywood genres, including melodramas, mysteries, Westerns, gangster films, and musicals, allowing black actors, especially those with light skin, the opportunity to play a variety of leading roles.⁶⁶ By responding to the misconception that her “start in movies” came from MGM, Horne strategically locates herself within black entertainment culture, as a product of “race movies.”

When discussing her Hollywood career, Horne again works to situate her film performances, as well as those of the old Hollywood guard, within a history of black performance strategies and traditions of racial uplift. In “My Story,” Horne tells Al Monroe that her fans have said to her, “‘you are unique in the roles you play so far as Negroes are concerned...and such roles usually cast you as a glamorous person.’”⁶⁷ Represented as “the New Cinematic Negro” by Hollywood, the black press, and NAACP executive secretary Walter White, Horne’s autobiographical performances of this period attempt to placate those members of the established black film community who viewed her contractual refusal to play “menial” roles as a threat to their economic livelihood and criticism of their on-screen performances. Through her autobiographical storytelling, Horne explicitly aligns herself, by self-defining as a black performer, with Hollywood’s old guard of black entertainers and implicitly distances herself from the controversy surrounding White’s campaign to reform Hollywood’s depiction of African Americans onscreen.

As a leader in the NAACP’s decades-long crusade to end racism in the film capital, Walter White partnered with Wendell Willkie to launch a wartime campaign demanding Hollywood “stamp out distorted representations of [black] people” as “buffoons” or “humble servants” and “to depict the Negro in films as a normal human being and an integral part of the

⁶⁶ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 78-80.

⁶⁷ Horne and Monroe, “My Story,” May 24, 1947, 2.

life of America and the world.”⁶⁸ Many black Hollywood players, including Hattie McDaniel and Clarence Muse, interpreted White’s campaign and his failure to involve them in negotiations with the studio heads as evidence of his disregard for their acting talents, his ignorance concerning their off-screen performances of respectability and civil rights activism, and his desire to oust them from their position within Hollywood.⁶⁹

Therefore, when White presented Horne as his vision for “the New Cinematic Negro” at the annual Los Angeles meeting of the NAACP in 1942, black Hollywood expressed its indignation.⁷⁰ White’s presentation of “a new charter for race characterization onscreen” and Horne, with her light skin, lithe body, and black bourgeois upbringing, as representative of this new characterization sparked controversy among established black motion-picture personalities, whose input White continued to ignore.⁷¹

According to *Afro-American* writer Ralph Harris, “outstanding artists of color in the cinema capital,” including Oscar-winner Hattie McDaniel, Clarence Muse, Mantan Moreland, and Lillian Randolph, critiqued the White’s program, arguing that it “Hinders Rather Than Aids in Solving Movie Problems.”⁷² In the article, McDaniel alluded to Horne specifically saying, “I naturally resent being completely ignored at the [Los Angeles NAACP] convention after I have struggled for eleven years to open up opportunities for our group in the industry and have tried to reflect credit upon my race, in exemplary conduct both on and off the screen. You can imagine

⁶⁸ “White Hits Distorted Movie Roles 2nd Time,” *Afro-American*, October 23, 1943, 8, annotated in Charlene B. Regester, *Black Entertainers in African American Newspaper Articles: An Annotated Bibliography of the Chicago Defender, the Afro-American (Baltimore), the Los Angeles Sentinel and the New York Amsterdam News, 1910-1950*, vol. 1 (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2002), 468, brackets in Regester; Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (1948; reprint, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 201; Walter White quoted in Jill Watts, *Hattie McDaniel: Black Ambition, White Hollywood*, (New York: Amistad, 2005), 217.

⁶⁹ Watts, *Hattie McDaniel*, 217.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

⁷¹ Ralph Matthews, “Exclusive: The Truth About Hollywood and the Race Issue from the Actors’ Viewpoint” *Afro-American*, January 9, 1943, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore *Afro-American* (1893-1988).

⁷² *Ibid.*

my chagrin when the only person called to the platform was a young woman from New York who had just arrived in Hollywood and had not yet made her first picture.”⁷³ Walter White, in condemning Hollywood, and by extension McDaniel and her black colleagues, for “perpetuat[ing] stereotype[s] which [are] doing the Negro infinite harm,” overlooked the possible financial ramifications of his crusade for established black actors.⁷⁴ Moreover, he disregarded the possibility that McDaniel, in the words of film scholar Charlene Regester, “empowered herself [and her audience] through her transformation of the subservient (subordinate, dehumanized, and devalued) into the dominant (defiant and directing).”⁷⁵ He also ignored black Hollywood’s long history of challenging their on-screen depictions through the performance of middle-class respectability and protest politics offscreen.

For example, McDaniel made personal appearances on behalf of Delta Sigma Theta’s college scholarship fund for African American women; formed the Negro Division of the wartime Hollywood Victory Committee; acted as captain of the American Women’s Volunteer Service Organization; established with other black actors the Hollywood Fair Play Committee, which advocated for more dignified film roles for African Americans; sat on the nominating board of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), a position that allowed her to advance black representation within union’s leadership, facilitating Horne’s 1943 election to the SAG board of directors; and worked on behalf of the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP.⁷⁶

Within *In Person*, Horne briefly mentions White, which is noteworthy given the significance White assumes in *Lena*, Horne’s 1965 autobiographical performance discussed in chapter five. Describing her arrival in Hollywood, Horne writes, “In fact, it was just about this

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Walter White quoted in Watts, *Hattie McDaniel*, 217.

⁷⁵ Regester, *African American Actresses*, 131.

⁷⁶ Watts, *Hattie McDaniel*, 126-127, 209-210, 218-219, 223-224, 230-231.

time that Wendell Willkie came to Hollywood with Walter White, head of the NAACP, where he made an eloquent plea for a revision of Hollywood's approach to Negroes as people."⁷⁷ Horne's "My Story" discussion of black Hollywood leaves White unmentioned, yet works to implicitly distance Horne from his Hollywood crusade. In both autobiographical pieces Horne aligns herself with the older generation of black actors White ignored. In "My Story," Horne explains her "unique" roles as a "glamorous person" when compared to those typically performed by black actors. She states,

Here is an impression I should like to correct now. I was signed for films to do what I know best, acting and singing and to perform in the manner I know best. I can no more be expected to perform the fine roles acted by such artists as the late Marie Dresser, Hattie McDaniels [*sic*], Helen Hayes, "Rochester" Anderson, and others than I can replace Johnny Weismuller in "Tarzan" thrillers. They are all a part of the variety program for the entertainment and education of the nation's movie fans. I adored Miss McDaniel in "Gone With the Wind" and other pictures she has "stolen." I like her because she is great at doing what Hollywood selected her to do. I have tried to do the same thing. I only hope I have pleased my public as well as other specialized performers have entertained me.⁷⁸

By dedicating part of "My Story" to challenge the "impression" that her opinions reflected White's criticisms of the work of the majority of black stars, Horne explicitly aligns herself in solidarity with the black film community (as well as their black fans) and implicitly rejects comparison with White. Additionally, in her assertion that she "adored Miss McDaniel in 'Gone With the Wind' and other pictures she has 'stolen,'" she celebrates McDaniel's ability to, as Regester argues, "center the margin" in her role as Mammy.⁷⁹

Similarly, in *In Person*, Horne positions herself as understanding, and respecting, the "plight" of the "handful of Negro actors and actresses who actually appeared on the screen from

⁷⁷ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 205.

⁷⁸ Horne and Monroe, "My Story," May 24, 1947, 2.

⁷⁹ Regester, *African American Actresses*, 131, 150-161.

time to time [and who] were forced to play roles...which were negative and misleading.”⁸⁰

Horne, unlike White, suggests that she is able to distinguish between the on-screen roles and the professionals who play them. As a performer, herself, Horne suggests that she recognizes black actor’s on-screen efforts to dignify menial roles in the face of stereotyping as well as their off-screen efforts to uplift the race through respectability and protest politics. Situating herself as an entertainer entrenched within a black theater history that attempts to uplift the race through performances of respectability both onscreen and off as well as through civil rights activism, Horne acknowledges the financial incentives for acting in “highly distasteful” roles, which she had done in performing primitive glamour for Cotton Club patrons earlier in her career.⁸¹

In *In Person*, Horne acknowledges that, unlike her Hollywood predecessors, “there were a great many elements in [her] favor” that created the space for her to reject certain stereotypical roles, a space previously unavailable to black actors in Hollywood. Horne recognizes that “the times we were living in had a profound effect on my career.” She writes, “I was being presented to the motion picture industry when the agitation for equal rights for my people had reached a new peak. For years the Negro press, Negro movie fans and organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League had been campaigning for jobs for Negroes in the motion picture industry and for a more honest portrayal of Negro characters on the screen.”⁸² Once again, Horne rejects the notion that she is a Hollywood product. Instead, she situates her “groundbreaking” MGM contract – and her ability to “avoid playing any role which [she] thought could reflect unfavorably on [her] people” – within a history of black activism within and outside the entertainment industry.⁸³

⁸⁰ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 201.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 205.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 201-202.

Discussing her Hollywood career in *In Person*, Horne concedes that “in the eyes of the fans I must have seemed to have been in a most satisfying position.”⁸⁴ Yet, through autobiographical performances, Horne attempts to talk back to her Hollywood objectification “again and again and again” as “the ‘colored glamour girl,’” mere “atmosphere” as “a night club entertainer in a cafe visited by the main characters in the story.”⁸⁵ Behind the “artificial glamour,” Horne represents herself as discouraged.⁸⁶ As a child, she describes herself as having “‘Leading Lady’ dreams” – “aspir[ing] to do more than just come on the screen, sing a song, and disappear” and hoping to play “real roles.”⁸⁷ Despite “apparently living [her] girlhood dream,” Horne argues that “not all [her] dreams had come true.”⁸⁸ Throughout *In Person*, Horne’s professional successes are tempered by countless experiences of prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism within the white-controlled entertainment industry. Horne recounts her many experiences of racism and colorism as a performer in theatre, nightclubs, and Hollywood. Denied jobs by those whites who “wouldn’t hire Negroes” as well as by those whites who considered Horne “‘too light’” and “‘too refined for a Negro,’” Horne decries this double discrimination.⁸⁹ Although she is a famed entertainer, an “Ambassador of Good Will,” who performs respectability for white audiences, Horne argues that her dream of stardom in a world of racial “equality and tolerance” has “yet [to] come true.”⁹⁰

“The Turning Point of My Life”⁹¹

In addition to entrenching Horne’s onstage performance practices within black entertainment history, *In Person* similarly positions the “growth of [her] social consciousness”

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 231, 218.

⁸⁶ Horne and Monroe, “My Story,” May 24, 1947, 2.

⁸⁷ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 222; Horne and Monroe, “My Story,” May 17, 1947, 2.

⁸⁸ Horne, “My Life Story,” 3.

⁸⁹ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 148, 147.

⁹⁰ Horne, “My Life Story,” 9, 12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

and her offstage activist persona within African American performance culture.⁹² Prior to her engagement at Café Society, Horne self-describes as angered by the racism she experiences as a black entertainer and frustrated by the apparent acquiescence of her fellow performers. Unable to articulate fully her anger and frustration, Horne represents herself as “ready but also not ready to speak” back to racial oppression.⁹³

Of the economic exploitation of the Cotton Club chorines, Horne writes, “I thought the older girls in the show...ought to speak up to the management.... We were doing our jobs. We had a right to speak our minds! ...I’d urge them to protest, they’d shake their heads.”⁹⁴ Here, the textual Horne is able to “speak her mind” to her Cotton Club cast-mates, but unable “to speak up to the management.” Horne’s auto-portrait represents the young Lena as inclined to talk back to the racist dominant culture, but powerless to do so at this point in her life-story. According to Horne, the chorus girls told her, “‘You’ll get used to [the racism]. You got to get used to it or you’ll go crazy.’”⁹⁵ Although the narrative Horne understands the various economic reasons the cast members “gripe” but do not dissent, she is left feeling dissatisfied and “emptier than ever.”⁹⁶ This self-representation continues as Horne recalls performing with Noble Sissle’s orchestra.

While Horne represents Noble Sissle as concerned with countering negative stereotypes of African Americans through onstage and offstage performances of black respectability – a strategy Horne calls “the Ambassador of Goodwill Theory” – she questions what she perceives

⁹² Gertrude Martin, “Lena Horne’s Rise To Stardom Is Told In Frank, Winning Story,” review of *In Person: Lena Horne* by Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, October 21, 1950, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

⁹³ Corinne Squire, “Experience-Centered and Culturally-Oriented Approaches to Narrative,” in *Doing Narrative Research*, eds. Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Maria Tamboukou, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 57.

⁹⁴ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 52.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52, 60.

as the orchestra's acceptance of segregation.⁹⁷ Describing an engagement with Sissle's orchestra in the nation's capital, Horne writes, "But none of the musicians seemed to get upset about [Washington D.C.'s Jim Crow policies], as I did. At least from what I could see, they didn't seem upset. I thought that was all wrong. They were men. They ought to protest this unfairness. They ought to speak out and say it was mean and unfair and they didn't like it."⁹⁸ According to Horne, the band dealt with racism through humor that critiqued the duplicity of a Jim Crow "seat of democracy."⁹⁹ Although "it began to dawn on" the textual Horne "that the bandsmen were just as alive to these injustices as [she] was and that these wry things they said were the way they showed it," she "couldn't figure out why they didn't say something openly about it."¹⁰⁰

In Person's young Lena believes it is the role of the black men in the band to protest discrimination and to protect her, the young black woman, from racism as they travel the northern United States. "When [they] turned South, however," Horne's expectations of her male companions change reflecting what sociologist Ruth Frankenberg has termed the "trope-ical family."¹⁰¹ This "repertoire of 'images' or tropes" co-construct the White Man as the protector of White Woman, whose racial chastity is threatened by the predatory Black Man (alternatively described by Angela Davis as the Myth of the Black Rapist).¹⁰² Black Woman is co-constructed as sexually available, especially for White Man, shoring up White Woman's sexual purity.¹⁰³ As Frankenberg argues, this discursive repertoire has worked "to explain or justify (to the oppressor, if no one else) myriad forms of disciplining violence – physical, cultural, psychic – in locations

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁰¹ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 87; Ruth Frankenberg, "Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness" in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 12.

¹⁰² Frankenberg, "Local Whitenesses," 11-12; see Angela Davis, "Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist" in *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 172-201.

¹⁰³ Frankenberg, "Local Whitenesses," 12.

‘structured in dominance.’”¹⁰⁴ Aware that white southerners maintained white supremacy through “physical assault” and “mental violence” against black men, supposedly justified by the threat they posed to white women, Horne suggests, “while we were in the South, protest of any kind was the last thing on my mind. But when we came North again, my confusion grew.”¹⁰⁵

Although young Horne “thought [northern Jim Crow] was all wrong,” she suggests to readers that gender and age expectations “kept [her] quiet.”¹⁰⁶ As a “girl,” the autobiographical Horne “unhappily” defers to Sissle’s orchestra and her mother when advised, “Pay no attention to these white folks” and “Don’t let it bother you.”¹⁰⁷ Through these autobiographical anecdotes, Horne constructs herself as primed to “speak out” against injustice at this young age, yet obliged by gender and age prescriptions to “bite [her] tongue.”¹⁰⁸ By reconstructing these events, Horne offers her readers an explanation for her earlier complicity with Jim Crow conventions. She also readies her audience for the representation of her “faulty ‘before’ self” as a young, black female entertainer silent on racism and enveloped by prejudice.¹⁰⁹ Horne suggests that before her Café Society engagement, she is angered by white “ignorance” and embittered by the apparently “docile and resigned” stance of her fellow African Americans.¹¹⁰

In her autobiographical performances of this era, Horne frames her Café Society engagement as “the turning point of [her] life.”¹¹¹ In many ways, *In Person* represents an elaboration upon Horne’s 1947 *Ebony* and 1949 “My Story” conversion narratives, with Horne describing in greater detail the “radical transformation from [her] faulty ‘before’ self to [her]

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 88.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 192.

¹¹⁰ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 178; Horne describes herself as bitter and angry as she constructs her pre-Café Society self, see *In Person*, 167, 178, 189-191.

¹¹¹ Horne, “My Life Story,” 11.

enlightened ‘after’ self.”¹¹² In *In Person*, Horne highlights her tenure at Café Society and her relationship with actor-singer-activist Paul Robeson, who she meets while performing at the integrated nightclub, as the “critical events” that “challenged [her] understanding or world view” and “inform[ed her] future behaviour and understanding.”¹¹³ For Horne, Robeson and her fellow Café Society cast-mates represented a different type of black performer, unlike the Cotton Club chorus girls and Noble Sissle’s orchestra, and offered a template for her “enlightened” persona as an African American activist-performer. According to Horne, the cast of Café Society challenged stereotypes of African Americans offstage through their comportment and onstage through their performances, but they also challenged oppression by performing activism through songs and speeches at political rallies and meetings.

Highlighting the conversionary significance of her Café Society engagement, Horne opens chapter six of *In Person* by writing, “I said a little prayer the day Barney Josephson hired me to work at Cafe Society Downtown.”¹¹⁴ For Horne, her tenure at Café Society represents the moment when her present persona as autobiographer and her “dream” of “equality and tolerance” coalesced.¹¹⁵ In telling the story of her Café Society engagement, Horne constructs a conversation with Josephson, in which, he says, “‘We want you to be yourself here, Miss Horne. We want you to let your own personality come out in your performance. Our audiences don’t expect to see stereotypes. We have made a practice of presenting Negro artists as they really are.’”¹¹⁶ Up to this point in Horne’s narrative, nightclub owners have consistently told the performer that as “‘Negro ingénue,’” who “‘looks like a sun-tanned white girl’” and sings like

¹¹² Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 192.

¹¹³ Leonard Webster and Patricie Mertova, *Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method: An Introduction to Using Critical Event Narrative Analysis in Research on Learning and Teaching* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 74.

¹¹⁴ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 172.

¹¹⁵ Horne, “My Life Story,” 4, 12.

¹¹⁶ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 173.

one as well, she is unhirable.¹¹⁷ As Horne presents the story, Josephson's encouragement that she portray "herself" – "a Negro ingénue" – onstage frees her from the expectation that she "'get hot'" for Café Society audiences, allowing her to perform black female respectability offstage *and* onstage by projecting beauty, refinement, demureness, and a chic fashion sensibility.¹¹⁸ By performing "herself" onstage, Horne feels that she is challenging stereotypes of black female performers as "shout singers" who "'get hot'" onstage, in particular, and African American women as asexual mummies or hypersexual jezebels, in general.

Liberated from the expectation that she "'get hot'" for her audiences and encouraged to perform "herself," Horne writes, "I began to build a repertoire of my own. [...] I concentrated on songs which I thought were not only suitable to my own voice and personality, but were also old, a little worn, and loved." In describing her repertoire of Broadway tunes and torch songs – most often the selections of white chanteuses – as fitting her "voice and personality," Horne flouts essentialist stereotypes that confine black female singers to the blues tradition. At the same time, she also challenges criticisms that she "sings like a white girl" by asserting her "right to sing the blues."¹¹⁹ She writes of her Café Society songs, "If some of them were blues, it was because I felt that the blue mood was closest to my own. ...[My] underlying pain was still deeply rooted, and I could pour more sincerity into numbers whose melodies and lyrics carried a kind of haunting pathos...[such as] *Stormy Weather*, *The Man I Love*, *My Bill*, *Got a Right to Sing the Blues*, *Daddy*, *Summertime*, *Mad About the Boy*."¹²⁰ In this passage, Horne challenges the "staged antagonism" between supposedly authentic "blues-singing, dark-skinned black women"

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 142, 147.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 195-196.

and allegedly inauthentic “‘light-skinned’ chorus girls and variety hall crooners.”¹²¹ According to Horne, by allowing her to perform “herself” as “[she] really is” rather than one-dimensional stereotypes for a “mixed audience,” Barney Josephson of Café Society allowed her to politicize her onstage performances like never before.¹²²

At the same time, *In Person* also credits the Café Society cast – including Teddy Wilson, Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammonds, and Pete Johnson – and regular patron, Paul Robeson, with facilitating Horne’s offstage politicization, further establishing Horne’s activist identity as imbedded in a black performance tradition of activism. Of her “fellow-performers at Cafe Society Downtown,” Horne writes, “I’d never met Negroes like them before.”¹²³ According to Horne, unlike the Cotton Club chorines or Sissle’s orchestra, Café Society performers “gave most of their spare-time efforts to organizations which were fighting to help them – to help all our people.”¹²⁴ Horne portrays a Harlem benefit to organize against racist housing conditions, and “the subsequent benefits [she] played,” with the Cafe Society cast as instrumental in her personal transformation.¹²⁵ Of these benefits, she writes:

I heard men and women declare from those platforms that we were citizens and taxpayers and that our ancestors had contributed as much to the strength and might of America as any other Americans. And that we were entitled to all the fruits of this land. We had the right to hold jobs. We were sick of being the last to be hired, the first to be fired, and the worst-paid under any circumstances. We wanted to right to send our children to school – yes, to public school like any other children. We wanted protection against landlords who refused to rent to us, against shopkeepers who charged us as much as 30 per cent more than white customers paid for the same merchandise in other parts of the city. We wanted police protection, not police brutality.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 195-196.

¹²² Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 180.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Through this story, Horne reconstructs a political benefit and, at the same time, advances the argument that African Americans – as citizens, taxpayers, and descendants of enslaved and free Africans – deserve equal opportunity. She calls for specific changes to discriminatory labor, educational, housing, sales, and policing practices.

The faulty “before” Horne experiences an awakening, as a result of these political rallies:

It took me quite some time to understand. But at last the truth began to dawn on me; and when it did, I saw my own people in an entirely new perspective. We weren’t all docile and resigned and inwardly bitter. We weren’t just sitting in our homes waiting for someone to reach out and do things for us. ...The voice of my people had made...changes happen! The strong, proud, united voice of my people – sure of our rights as Americans and demanding them! ...I wanted to stand beside the speakers and add my voice to theirs. I couldn’t make speeches. I didn’t know any impressive facts and figures about housing or jobs. But I could sing. And that would help. Whenever they wanted me, I vowed within myself, I would be there.¹²⁷

Horne attributes these benefits with the realization that not all African Americans were content with the status quo and that people have the power, through protest, to affect political change. Still, Horne self-represents as “ready but also not ready to speak” back to racial oppression.¹²⁸ Realizing the power of black collective action, but unconfident in her ability to “speak out,” the autobiographical Horne decided to add her voice of protestation by “singing out” against racism. At this stage in Horne’s narrative, the “faulty” Lena is primed for her conversionary moment, made possible by the mentorship of activist performer Paul Robeson.

At the center of *In Person*, Horne constructs Paul Robeson’s life narrative, describing “what [Robeson’s] life was like” as he rose to stardom “as a famous concert artist in the capitals of Europe.”¹²⁹ Using a story within a story narrative structure, Horne draws parallels between

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 178-179.

¹²⁸ Squire, “Experience-Centered,” 57.

¹²⁹ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 187, 188.

“Paul’s story” and her own to construct her autobiographical self in Robeson’s image. In fashioning her transformative exchanges with Robeson, Horne writes,

To my amazement, the stories [Robeson] told in answer to my questions carried the same hurt, the same denial, the same rejection all our people suffer. When I first heard these stories, I was stunned. Could it be that even a Robeson was treated as I was? But there he was – the internationally beloved concert artist – sitting quietly beside me and describing the identical pain that I had felt! And I have since learned to tell Paul’s story, as well as my own, not only because this knowledge brought me closer to my own people, but because Paul’s life proved to me that we cannot buy democracy with success. Paul had had every success, yet he’d been hounded by discrimination every step of the way.¹³⁰

Through *In Person*, Horne highlights the limits of the black elite’s belief in the power of exceptional black individuals, especially artists like Robeson and herself, to uplift the race in the eyes of white America. This uplift ideology reasoned that a handful of gifted African Americans, whose talents garnered them fame and favor among whites, would facilitate racial integration on a larger scale. In 1924, Robeson expressed confidence in the ability of art alone to “bridge the gulf between the white and black races.”¹³¹ As biographer Martin Duberman writes, “To the minimal extent he was political at all in these years, he looked to individual cultural achievement – not organized, collective action – as the likeliest channel for the advance of the race.”¹³² Yet, by the time he met Horne, Robeson had come to question and, ultimately, reject the black elite’s uplift ideology linking the success of exceptional African Americans with racial advancement.¹³³ Despite his acclaim as “the internationally beloved concert artist,” Robeson’s continued experiences with discrimination as well as his increasing politicization during the 1930s and 1940s, made him realize that in addition to performing respectability offstage and onstage,

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹³¹ Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 70; Waldron, *Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance*, 162; Paul Robeson quoted in Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 71.

¹³² Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 72.

¹³³ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 250-251.

celebrated African American performers have a responsibility to actively fight racism and class inequality within the larger society.

Through this narrative construction of “Paul’s life,” *In Person* highlights the themes that pervade Horne’s surrounding autobiographical performance. As African American stars celebrated by the dominant culture, Robeson and Horne seemingly live a life of “fantasy,” divorced from the realities of racism that face the majority of “[their] people.”¹³⁴ Horne’s autobiographical project – her reason for “tell[ing] Paul’s story, as well as [her] own” – is to disprove the notion that democracy is achievable through the individual success of black artists. With *In Person*, Horne challenges popular representations of her allegedly charmed life by highlighting the specific brand of racism she faces as a black female entertainer as well as the “ugliness, unfairness, inconvenience, and cowardice” she, like “every colored person” in America, experiences just “because [she is] not white.”¹³⁵ With *In Person*, Horne seeks to racially “authenticate” her performances as an entertainer and an activist within black performance culture and history. She credits other African American performers – especially Paul Robeson – with illuminating her “responsibility” as a black artist to “join actively in [the African American] struggle.”¹³⁶

Ultimately, Horne’s self-fashioned persona as Robeson’s female counterpart took on new significance just before *In Person* appeared in print. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, Robeson’s pro-Soviet sympathies and continued criticisms of U.S. foreign policy had fallen outside what historian Mary L. Dudziak describes as “the narrowed scope of acceptable

¹³⁴ “Lena’s Story Not a Fantasy,” 9.

¹³⁵ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 175.

¹³⁶ Horne, “My Life Story,” 12; Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 193, 243.

protest.”¹³⁷ Denounced as a Communist, Robeson found himself abandoned by many of his former allies, stripped of his passport, and facing financial ruin. Consequently, Horne’s praise for Robeson in *In Person*, tolerable in 1947 but suspect in 1950, heightened the extant charges of her “communistic leanings.”¹³⁸ To make matters worse for Horne, a “movie story editor” identified her *In Person* collaborator Carlton Moss as a known Communist before the House Un-American Activities Committee in April 1951.¹³⁹ Under the constraints of red-baiting, Horne would refashion her life-story by distancing herself from Robeson, disavowing Moss, and adopting the mask of anticommunism in order to maintain economic viability and political legitimacy.

¹³⁷ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11.

¹³⁸ Alice Dunningan, “Colored Movie Stars Described as Good Americans at Red Probe,” *Afro-American*, November 8, 1947, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

¹³⁹ “Hollywood Four Refuse Replies to Red Inquiry,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1951, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881-1987).

CHAPTER 3

PRETTY IN PINK?

Lena Horne and the Performance of Cold War Loyalty Ritual

In November 1947, when *Ebony* reported Lena Horne as saying, “[Paul Robeson] changed my whole way of thinking – if I may say so, my whole life,” Robeson remained at the height of his fame and credibility as an internationally beloved singer and activist.¹ However, when *In Person* hit bookstores in October 1950, Horne’s tribute to Robeson’s “fighting spirit” and her self-fashioned persona as his female counterpart assumed unforeseeable connotations.²

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, the state deemed Robeson and Du Bois highly “subversive.” Despite a race-wide political shift rightward, Robeson and Du Bois continued to criticize the racist and imperialist ideologies underpinning American domestic and foreign policy; at the same time, they praised Soviet Russia for its alleged lack of “color prejudice.”³ The global reach of Robeson as a celebrated antiracist singer-activist and Du Bois as “the father of Pan-Africanism” drew international attention to U.S. racial discrimination, challenging America’s self-image as democratic leader of the “free world” and representation of the USSR as Communist leader of the “slave world.”⁴ Robeson and Du Bois’s persistent critiques of American foreign relations, Jim Crow, and colonial oppression of African and Asian people posed a significant threat to the United States’ efforts to influence “Third World” perceptions of American race relations in the war to “contain” the spread of communism. As historian Penny M. Von Eschen argues, “An integral part of these efforts was the systematic repression of [these]

¹ “Meet the Real Lena Horne,” *Ebony*, November 1947, 9.

² Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, *In Person: Lena Horne* (New York: Greenberg, 1950), 193.

³ Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand* (1958; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 48.

⁴ Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 25.

anticolonial activists.”⁵ Through Federal Bureau of Investigation surveillance, red-baiting, and prosecution, cold warriors “virtually crushed these two intellectual giants.”⁶

Therefore, Horne’s admiration for Robeson in *In Person* intensified the existing allegations of her “Red” leanings. As an international personality associated with Robeson’s socialist sympathies, Horne had to walk a fine line when self-representing as a cold war civil rights activist. Suspicions of Horne’s political allegiances mounted when Hollywood ex-Communist Party member Meta Reis Rosenberg named Carlton Moss, Horne’s *In Person* collaborator, as a member of a Hollywood Communist “cell.”⁷

In this chapter, I examine Horne’s continued project of autobiographical self-fashioning within the strictures of early 1950s America. Faced with popular press representations that portrayed her as “un-American” – a Communist sympathizer – Horne attempted to construct a race-conscious persona separate from Robeson and her other postwar political allies in order to maintain economic security and political acceptability within the dominant cold war American society. I argue that Horne’s self-representational performances reflect the rapid rise of anticommunism and its effects on postwar progressives.

From Leftist to Liberal: Horne’s Shifting Politics

Horne was first accused of “toeing the [Communist] line” in late 1947. The characterization of Horne as un-American reached its height between 1949 and 1953.⁸ As one of

⁵ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 3.

⁶ Vincent Harding, Robin D. G. Kelley, and Earl Lewis, “We Changed the World: 1945-1970” in *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans*, eds. Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 454.

⁷ Williams Edwards, “Literary Agent Names 7 More As Movie Reds: Confirms Testimony of Parks, Hayden,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 14, 1951, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849-1987). See also Murrey Marder, “Witness Was in Hollywood ‘Cell,’ Names More as Reds,” *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1951, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994); “Hollywood Four Refuse Replies to Red Inquiry,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1951, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881-1987).

⁸ George S. Schuyler, “Lovely Lena Toes the Line,” *Plain Talk*, November 1947, quoted in “Lena Horne,” Federal Bureau of Investigation File 100-353031, *NYCity News Service*, September 30, 2010, available from

the most internationally celebrated African Americans of the era, Horne's postwar censure of U.S. domestic and foreign policies was commonly thought to undercut governmental claims of American democracy's moral superiority over Communism. The mass media, especially the conservative press, represented Horne as fellow-traveler in an effort to contain her activism. By fashioning Horne as a "pinko," the conservative mass media worked to cast her antiracism as Communism and, therefore, unacceptable. By rendering Horne's activism "Red" or "pink" rather than "black" and obscuring the ways that her racialization led to her politicization, conservative red-baiters worked to cloak their racism beneath the more acceptable veil of anticommunism.

Ultimately, the Red Scare constrained Horne's post-1947 autobiographical practices and performances of civil rights activism. Cold war harassment worked to silence Horne's critique of racism, colonialism, antilaborism, anti-Semitism, Communist "witch hunts," and the escalation of U.S.-Soviet enmity as interlocking oppressions rooted in capitalism. In order to maintain her legitimacy and financial viability, Horne adopted the stance of many civil rights liberals, performing anticommunism through public statements issued to national newspapers as well as "private" meetings with prominent cold warriors George Sokolsky and Theodore Kirkpatrick and an autobiographical clearance letter written to Hollywood labor leader Roy M. Brewer, also a staunch anticommunist.⁹ Each of these public and "private" performances of national loyalty drew on ritualized anticommunist acts.

As noted in chapter one, in October 1947, the FBI targeted Horne's political activities for investigation, citing her relationship with Paul Robeson, her *People's Voice* column, and her

http://nycitynewsservice.com/files/2010/09/FBI_LenaHorne.pdf (accessed November 6, 2010); Sherry Mazzocchi, "FBI Tracked Lena Horne's Activist Life," *NYCity News Service*, September 30, 2010, available from <http://nycitynewsservice.com/2010/09/30/fbi-tracked-lena-hornes-activist-life/> (accessed November 6, 2010).

⁹ "Horne," FBI File 100-353031.

support of organizations deemed “Communist influenced groups” as suspect.¹⁰ By November 1947, the public began to question “whether [Horne] had communistic leanings.”¹¹ As anticommunism heightened, Horne’s postwar analysis of racism, antilaborism, colonialism, anti-Semitism, Communist “witch hunts,” and escalating U.S.-Soviet conflict as interlocking oppressions represented an unacceptable political critique. Aware of rising red-baiting, Horne started to distance herself from Paul Robeson’s leftist politics in early 1948. Whereas Robeson promptly announced his support of Henry A. Wallace’s presidential bid and the CPUSA soon followed, Horne apparently hesitated.¹² Her final column in the *People’s Voice* lauded Wallace’s decision to run for president. She wrote, “I know Henry Wallace. I happen to be a member of the National Board of the Progressive Citizens of America, which recently voted support for a third party ticket headed by Wallace. I did not differ with that decision, and still do not.”¹³ With her statement interpreted as an endorsement of Wallace’s candidacy, Horne asked *People’s Voice* to issue a public apology for “misrepresenting [her] views.” Citing an “unfortunately faulty transmission” and “stenographic errors” *People’s Voice* announced that “Miss Horne’s column last week contained two garbled paragraphs which resulted in a srious [sic] distortion of the viewpoint of our distinguished columnist. ...Miss Horne was quoted as endorsing the candidacy of Henry A. Wallace for President of the United States. Miss Horne has as yet taken no position regarding personal support or endorsement of any candidate.”¹⁴ Shortly after, the black press

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Alice Dunningan, “Colored Movie Stars Described as Good Americans at Red Probe,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), November 8, 1947, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988). See also Schuyler, “Lovely Lena Toes the Line,” quoted in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹² Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: The New Press, 1989), 324; “Proof Reds Back Wallace Is Claimed,” *The Washington Post*, February 8, 1948, M10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994).

¹³ Lena Horne, “From Me to You: Henry Wallace Does It Again,” *People’s Voice*, January 10, 1948, 14.

¹⁴ “An Apology,” *People’s Voice*, January 17, 1948, page unknown.

reported that Horne and Robeson had discontinued their weekly columns “during the policy controversy involving Dr. Max Yergan and Doxey Wilkerson” discussed in the first chapter.¹⁵

As Von Eschen argues, the intensified anticommunism of the late 1940s precipitated “major shifts in black politics.”¹⁶ During and immediately following the Second World War, many liberal black leaders allied with progressives from across the political spectrum to criticize the Truman administration’s racist domestic and foreign policies. With the legitimacy of black collective action threatened by heightened cold war hysteria, African American liberals “reshaped black American political and rhetorical strategies.”¹⁷ In early 1947, civil rights liberals started to reject the left for its continued criticisms of Truman’s foreign policy and its analysis of racism as a global oppression entrenched in capitalism, slavery, and colonialism. By conceding to America’s position as leader of the free world at war with Communism and adopting anticommunism, liberal African Americans supported U.S. foreign policy as a strategy for protecting the black struggle for domestic civil rights.

Endeavoring to siphon northern African American votes from Wallace and cement northern urban African Americans’ recent shift to the Democratic Party, Truman’s reelection campaign “lent the prestige of his office to improvement of the status of African Americans.”¹⁸ As part of his civil rights platform, Truman issued Executive Orders 9980 and 9981 on July 26, 1948. These measures instituted a fair employment policy, prohibiting “discrimination because of race, color, religion, or national origin,” and desegregated the U.S. military.¹⁹ Bolstered by Truman’s issuance of tangible antidiscrimination directives, many African Americans viewed the

¹⁵ Bill Chase, “All Ears,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 17, 1948, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993); “Lena Horne, Paul Robeson Quit As Columnists,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 4, 1948, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003).

¹⁶ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 113.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁸ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 8th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 507.

¹⁹ Executive Order 9980 quoted in Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 507.

sitting president as the only viable civil rights candidate. The *Atlanta Daily World* urged the black electorate to move “Forward With Truman,” arguing that “a vote for Wallace is a lost vote” for “neither Wallace nor the Communist group can offer the balm so vital and necessary to heal the wounds from which Negroes have suffered so long.”²⁰ Following the November 1948 election, the *Daily World* reported that, “in spite of concentrated Wallace-party appeal for their votes,” African Americans overwhelmingly supported Harry Truman in the polls.²¹

Although some expected Horne along with Robeson to “hold the reigns, Negro-wise, in the Wallace camp,” Harry Levette of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* questioned “whether [Horne] will take as active part in politics as she did before she left [the U.S. to tour Europe].”²² Newspaper coverage of the period indicates that Horne refrained from entering the 1948 political debate with her earlier fervor. Shifting her loyalties, Horne endorsed the reelection of Harry Truman by performing “Stormy Weather” and “Indeed I Do” at “Truman’s Inaugural Gala” in segregated Washington, D.C.²³ At Truman’s invitation, Horne also sang “Just the Gypsy in My Soul,” “Stormy Weather,” and “That’s Why the Lady is a Tramp” at the annual Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner sponsored by the Democratic National Committee in Washington, D.C., on February 23, 1950.²⁴ Aware of rising anticommunism, she shied away from her alliances with leftist

²⁰ “Forward With Truman,” *Atlanta Daily World*, October 31, 1948, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

²¹ “The Negro Prefers Truman (*The New Republic*),” *Atlanta Daily World*, November 25, 1948, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

²² Russel A. Jacksin, “Around the Country,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 24, 1948, 5B, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Call and Post (1934-1991); Harry Keelan, “Voice in the Wilderness,” *Afro-American*, March 27, 1948, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); Harry Levette, “Close-Ups,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 29, 1948, 20, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (1934-2005).

²³ “Cream of Nation’s Talent Stars at Truman’s Inaugural Gala: Hampton Band, Lena Horne Star,” *Afro-American*, January 29, 1949, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988). See also Richard L. Coe, “Inaugural Note: Show Business Is On Overtime,” *The Washington Post*, January 16, 1949, L1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994); *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, January 22, 1949, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

²⁴ “Lena to Be Guest at Jackson Day Dinner,” *Afro-American*, February 18, 1950, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); “Largest Tan Delegation in History Attends Jefferson-Jackson Day Fete,” *Afro-American*, February 25, 1950, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-

organizations, instead positioning herself politically alongside liberal activist and social service organizations working toward racial uplift and “legalistic integration,” including the National Urban League (NUL), the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), and, chiefly, the NAACP.²⁵

Throughout the 1950s, Horne publicly supported the NAACP’s strategies for achieving legalistic integration by acting as chairperson of the organization’s annual Christmas Seal Campaign. With the political activities of the black left effectively suppressed by cold warriors, many came to perceive the NAACP as the “vanguard of black ‘radicalism.’”²⁶ Beginning in 1951, Horne penned yearly letters disseminated to members and friends of the organization. In these letters, Horne urged her audience to raise funds in support of the NAACP’s drive for full citizenship rights by purchasing the organization’s colorful cinderella stamps. The rhetoric of Horne’s first letter is indicative of her shift from postwar progressive to civil rights liberal:

Here in the United States, despite the persistence of discrimination against minority groups, we have made progress. Most of the advances since the turn of the century have been directly the result of the efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. This great organization, working always within the framework of our

1988); “Dems Rally ‘Round \$100 Plate Dinners In Washington,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, February 25, 1950, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); “Beauty’s More’n Skin Deep,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, February 25, 1950, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

²⁵ Sociologist Herbert H. Haines defines “legalistic integration” as the NAACP’s “long and calculated legal campaign against the separate-but-equal doctrine and the legal segregation which it condoned”; Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 18-19. On Horne’s work with the NAACP, NUL, NCNW, and YWCA, see, for example, Hazel L. Griggs, “Dr. Bethune, Lena Horne In Council Tea,” *Atlanta Daily World*, June 15, 1949, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); Hazel L. Griggs, “Dr. Bethune, Miss Horne Stir Chicago Audience at Council,” *Afro-American*, June 25, 1949, 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); “Lena Horne Guest at Closing of Brooklyn YMCA Membership Campaign,” *Atlanta Daily World*, November 3, 1949, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); “Guild’s 10th ‘Beaux Arts Ball’ To Attract World Famed Personalities To Savoy,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, January 28, 1950, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); “Lena Horne Heads NAACP Seal Drive,” *Atlanta Daily World*, November 1, 1951, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

²⁶ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 16-17, 20.

Constitution, has by legal, legislative, and educational means brought us nearer to our goal of a society of freedom, justice and equality.²⁷

Although, in this letter, Horne argues that existing racial barriers prevent American “democracy from being a full working reality,” she also asserts a belief that “freedom, justice and equality” are achievable by “working always within the framework of our Constitution.”²⁸ On the one hand, many viewed the NAACP as a militant organization that threatened white hegemony by challenging separate-but-equal doctrine through litigation and lobbying. On the other, the NAACP’s public purging of Communist influence and its end-goal of legalistic integration affirmed a faith in the ability of America’s existing legal institutions to extend democracy to African Americans. By adopting the NAACP’s anticommunist, integrationist platform, Horne created space to enact a “militant” civil rights persona that challenged the charges of red-baiters.

Notwithstanding the NAACP’s communist purge, the organization received hate mail in response to Horne’s annual letters. Several returned contribution cards contained racist, antisemitic, and anticommunist vitriol, accusing the NAACP of supporting the “Jewish controlled” Communist “Plot” and asserting, “We want no part of COMMUNISM – and we certainly are NOT interested in the Advancement of Colored People.”²⁹ Others attacked Horne personally: “You and Your Jewish Friends Can Go To Russia and Stay Put. You’re A Bunch of

²⁷ Lena Horne, 1951 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Christmas Seal Campaign letter, October 29, 1951, Box II: A173, Folder 10, The Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

²⁸ Lena Horne, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Christmas Seal Campaign letter, October 29, 1951, Box II: A173, Folder 10, The Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

²⁹ Unsigned, NAACP Christmas Seal Campaign contribution card, undated (c. 1956-1964), Box III: A 138, Folder 10 The Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Unsigned, NAACP Christmas Seal Campaign contribution card, 1954, Box II: A176, Folder 2, The Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Communist [*sic*], in my opinion.”³⁰ One note specifically targeted Horne’s interracial marriage – “Give my regards to Lena Horne, and that low white trash she married too.”³¹ Despite Horne’s public advocacy of the NAACP’s program for legalistic integrationism and affirmations of the promise of American democracy, some of the public continued to question her “Americanism.”

Black Stars Smeared in Red Probes

Even as Horne’s political affiliations shifted, Senator Jack Tenney’s California State Senate Committee on Un-American Activities – “California’s little HUAC” – named her with Paul Robeson, Henry A. Wallace, and black film actor Canada Lee alongside “numerous motion-picture personages, writers, musicians and other prominent individuals as having ‘followed or appeased some of the Communist party line program over a long period of time.’”³² On June 11, 1949, *The Philadelphia Tribune* reported that “most of the personalities mentioned [in the Tenney Committee’s report] were quick to issue denials of any interest in Communism or Communists.”³³ Likewise, *The Chicago Defender* announced, “The beauteous Lena Horne, stage and screen star...expressed indignation and resentment against the charge that she had associated with Communists.”³⁴ Constrained by the political climate and “smeared in Red probes,” Horne denied her previous political alliances with known Communists.³⁵ The black press noted that Paul Robeson, in the Soviet Union to celebrate the birth of the Afro-Russian poet Alexander

³⁰ J.D.C. Bailey, NAACP Christmas Seal Campaign contribution card, undated (c. 1956-1964), Box III: A 138, Folder 10, The Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

³¹ Unsigned, NAACP Christmas Seal Campaign contribution card, 1954, Box II: A176, Folder 2, The Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

³² Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names*, 3rd ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 179; “Hundreds Named As Red Appeasers: California’s Tenney Committee Lists Actors, Musicians, and Others as ‘Line’ Followers,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1949, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2007).

³³ “Lena Horne, Canada Lee Repudiate Red Th [*sic*]: Also List Robeson, Stars Call Reports Unfounded, Libel,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 11, 1949, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001).

³⁴ “Lee and Lena Deny Red Charge,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, June 25, 1949, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

³⁵ “Stars Smeared in Red Probes,” *Afro-American*, June 18, 1949, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

Pushkin, “could not be reached for a comment.”³⁶ According to the *Tribune*, Robeson “had just finished a tour of Europe which started at Paris when he attended the World Conference of Partisans of Peace several weeks ago.” In a gross understatement, the newspaper described Robeson’s impromptu remarks before the Paris Peace Conference on April 20, 1949 as “creat[ing] a minor uproar in the United States.”³⁷

In its coverage of the Paris Peace Conference, the Associated Press quoted Robeson as purportedly asserting, “‘It is unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war against a country [the Soviet Union] which in one generation has raised our people to the full dignity of mankind....’”³⁸ Robeson’s alleged statement recalled those made by earlier black intellectuals, who also questioned the hypocrisy of a Jim Crow army expecting black men to fight for an American “democracy” that denied them their rights as citizens.³⁹ However, Robeson’s enthusiasm for the Soviet Union fell beyond the realm of acceptable cold war politics and 1949-1950 marked a “turning point” in his representation by the white mainstream press.⁴⁰ Historian Mary E. Cygan argues that the dominant press abandoned its prior portrayal of Robeson as “the pre-eminent African American” following his Paris address.⁴¹ As Cygan contends, in 1949 and 1950 the white mainstream press “actively develop[ed] the image of Paul Robeson as ‘un-American,’” sharing in his “demonization” and, later, his erasure.⁴²

During the late 1940s and 1950s, prominent conservative journalists, leaders, and politicians effectively challenged African American collective action and legalistic integration by leveling accusations of “un-Americanism,” a practice known as red-baiting, against civil rights

³⁶ “Lena Horne, Canada Lee Repudiate,” 1; “Lee and Lena Deny Red Charge,” 1.

³⁷ “Lena Horne, Canada Lee Repudiate Red,” 1.

³⁸ Associated Press quoted in Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 342.

³⁹ Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 342.

⁴⁰ Mary E. Cygan, “A Man of His Times: Paul Robeson and the Press, 1924-1976” in *Paul Robeson: Essays on His Life and Legacy*, eds. Joseph Dorinson and William Pencak, 81-97 (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2002), 85.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 85, 81, 82.

activists and black protest organizations.⁴³ In an effort to avoid red-baiting, many black leaders, including Walter White of the NAACP, Dr. Vincent Brown of the NUL, and New York Democratic congressman Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Jr., denounced Robeson's statement, quickly issuing public responses extensively disseminated by the mainstream and black presses. Newspapers widely quoted Walter White as stating, "'We do not feel that Mr. Robeson voiced the opinion of the overwhelming majority of the 14,000,000 Negro Americans.'" ⁴⁴ Previously critical of Truman's foreign policy, the NAACP, led by Walter White, strategically backed U.S. foreign relations and adopted anticommunism, officially rejecting coalition with organizations supported by Communists, in early 1947.⁴⁵ As Eschen argues, the "dominant liberal argument against racism," advanced by White, "us[ed] anti-Communism to justify the fight against domestic discrimination and for civil rights, conced[ing] the high ground to anti-Communism."⁴⁶ In effort to maintain its legitimacy as the paramount civil rights organization, the NAACP sought to expunge Communists and fellow-travelers from its roster; even with the purge, the NAACP remained a target of red-baiting. As civil rights historian Adam Fairclough contends, "Anticommunist purges... were almost as damaging to the purger as the purged. ...Certainly, by

⁴³ Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 233.

⁴⁴ Walter White quoted in "Negro Leader Takes Issue With Robeson," *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1949, 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881-1987). Also see "Negro Heads Here Assail Robeson Talk," *The Washington Post*, April 22, 1949, 26, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (1877-1994); "Leaders Deny Contention of Paul Robeson," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 23, 1949, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); "[Flashes]: White Answers Robeson," *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 23, 1949, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001); "Robeson As Speaker For Negroes Denied," *New York Times*, April 25, 1949, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2007); Nat D. Williams, "Leaders Take Issue With Robeson On Race Loyalty," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 26, 1949, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); "We Beg To Differ," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 26, 1949, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); "Robeson Statements Provoke Storm of Dissenting Comments," *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 26, 1949, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001).

⁴⁵ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 92; Paul Frymer, *Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 62.

⁴⁶ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 110.

the 1950s the NAACP was smaller, weaker, and more conservative.”⁴⁷ Red-baiting proved a successful cold war tactic for undermining black protest organizations and shattering earlier civil rights alliances.⁴⁸

Despite Horne’s 1948-1949 efforts to distance herself from the politics of Robeson, Du Bois, and Wallace by fashioning herself as a black liberal, a supporter of Truman’s Democratic Party, the NAACP, and the NUL, her visibility as a civil rights activist and past relationships with progressives across the political spectrum left her open to red-baiting. Communists, dedicated to the struggle for black equality, comprised many of the civil rights organizations supported by Horne, including the National Negro Congress, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and the *People’s Voice*.⁴⁹ Accusations of Horne’s Communist sympathies heightened with the dissemination of *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television* on June 22, 1950. American Business Consultants, the publishers of *Counterattack*, a weekly newsletter devoted to the circulation of “facts to combat communism,” distributed *Red Channels*, known as “the bible of the blacklist.”⁵⁰ *Red Channels* named Horne as one of one hundred and fifty-one “prominent actors and artists [who] have been inveigled to lend their names...to organizations espousing Communist causes.”⁵¹ As alleged “public” proof of Horne’s “un-Americanism,” *Red Channels* cited Horne’s involvement with the American Committee for the Protection of Foreign Born (ACPFB), Council on African Affairs (CAA), Civil Rights Congress (CRC), Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW), United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), and United Negro and Allied Veterans of America (UNAVA); her recognition by *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker*; and her support of

⁴⁷ Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2001), 213.

⁴⁸ Painter, *Creating Black Americans*, 234.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁰ Elijah Wald, *Josh White: Society Blues* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 177.

⁵¹ *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television* (New York: American Business Consultants, Inc., 1950), 9.

Communist New York City Councilman Benjamin J. Davis.⁵² Although *Red Channels* purported to name names in order to identify and counter the Communist “infiltrat[ion of America’s] airways” by “den[ying those listed within] access to our microphones,” the pamphlet, like the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, fueled fear of a “pervasive, yet invisible enemy” able to deceive and exploit Americans.⁵³

Theodore Kirkpatrick, Vincent Harnett, and J. B. Matthews compiled *Red Channels*. Kirkpatrick, a former FBI agent known as “Mr. Counterattack,” first published *Counterattack* with two fellow ex-agents in 1947.⁵⁴ Described as a “professional anti-communist,” Harnett authored the brief preface to *Red Channels* and later founded Aware, Inc., an organization that compiled lists of “un-American” entertainers and charged television executives fees to vet potential hires.⁵⁵ J. B. Matthews, a fellow traveler turned anticommunist, directed research for HUAC.⁵⁶ Positioning themselves as informants and earning livings as professional anticommunists, Kirkpatrick, Harnett, and Matthews warned that the Communist Party had “‘colonized’” countless performers, networks, stations, advertisers, and unions “in the radio-TV field.”⁵⁷ *Red Channels* cautioned that the persons listed within “need not be party members or even deliberate cooperators. It is sufficient if they advance Communist objectives with complete

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9, 79-80.

⁵³ *Red Channels*, 6; Tony Perucci, “The Red Mask of Sanity: Paul Robeson, HUAC, and the Sound of Cold War Performance” *TDR: The Drama Review* 53 (Winter 2009): 31.

⁵⁴ “The Press: Mr. Counterattack Quits,” *Time*, June 30, 1950, available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,816555,00.html> (accessed April 25, 2011).

⁵⁵ Mark Goodson, “Testimony in *Faulk v. AWARE* (1962)” in Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 253. See Bonnie Brennen, “Blacklisting,” *Encyclopedia of Television News*, ed. Michael D. Murray (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1991), 18-19; Brenda Murphy, *Congressional Theatre: Dramatizing McCarthyism on Stage, Film, and Television* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28.

⁵⁶ Nelson L. Dawson, “From Fellow Traveler to Anticommunist: The Odyssey of J. B. Matthews,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* (Summer 1986): 280-306; David Nelson Duke, *In the Trenches with Jesus and Marx: Harry F. Ward and the Struggle for Social Justice* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 179.

⁵⁷ *Red Channels*, 5, 1.

unconsciousness.”⁵⁸ They suggested that the CPUSA’s “pretended objectives,” including “‘academic freedom,’ ‘civil rights,’ ‘peace,’ the H-Bomb,” and “the fight against anti-Semitism and Jimcrow,” effectively “dupe[d]” individuals, like “well-intentioned ‘liberals,’” into advancing the Communist Party line.⁵⁹ According to *Red Channels*, accountability for determining whether existing or potential employees “‘harbor[ed] views contrary to our form of government’” rested with “‘the station licensee (and the network to which a portion of that responsibility necessarily is delegated).’”⁶⁰ The film, radio, and fledgling television industries responded by blacklisting most of the accused named in the document.

On the same day that *Counterattack* released *Red Channels*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* announced that Horne had secretly married MGM composer Lennie Hayton, a white Jewish man, in 1947; the black press followed, publicizing the news on June 24, 1950.⁶¹ With interracial marriage ceremonies illegal in California, Horne and Hayton had married in Paris three years earlier. The disclosure of Horne’s interracial marriage with a Jewish man offered conservatives further ammunition for red-baiting the star. With American Jews disproportionately representing the whites involved in black-white interracial marriages and comprising approximately one-third of U.S. Communist Party (CPUSA) membership, anticommunists fostered racist and antisemitic characterizations of Jewish Americans as

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4, 2-3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ “Lena Horne’s 1947 Marriage Disclosed,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1950, 18, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881-1987); “Lena Horne Wed 3 Years Ago,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1950, 33, retrieved from ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2007); “Lena Horne’s Marriage to Hayton Disclosed,” *The Washington Post*, June 22, 1950, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994). See also “Lena Admits Marriage,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 24, 1950, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993), “Wed Three Years: Lena Admits Secret Marriage in Paris,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 24, 1950, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001); “Cables Courier, Secret’s Out: Lena Horne Is Married,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 24, 1950, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002).

“Nigger-loving Commies.”⁶² Furthermore, segregationists viewed interracial marriage, disparagingly called “miscegenation,” as a Communist plot to “undermine [America’s] strength and vitality” through “racial amalgamation.”⁶³ They characterized partners in interracial relationships as “mentally deranged communists,” advancing discursive linkages between racial intermarriage, Communism, and “psychological distress.”⁶⁴

According to Billy Rowe of the *Courier*, Horne learned of her inclusion in *Red Channels* while performing in “Gay Paree.”⁶⁵ With Horne listed in *Red Channels* and described as one of the “‘Pinkos’ in nightlife, films and the stage” by *New York Daily Mirror* columnist Lee Mortimer, Alvin Moses of the *Defender* wrote, “Lena Horne, Hollywood and theatre row lovely, has thousands of New Yorkers wondering if what they read...is true of her.”⁶⁶ Rowe reported that “Lena Horne Hayten [*sic*] is gathering all her forces and readying a blast against ‘Red Channels,’ the boogey-man of the profession which has her listed among its gathering of Communists and fellow-travelers.”⁶⁷ In spite of Rowe’s characterization of Horne as “so mad she almost blew a blood vessel,” the star remained largely silent on her entry in *Red Channels*, perhaps hoping the incident would blow over by mid-October, her scheduled return to the United States.⁶⁸ Horne continued her seven-month European tour mostly unaffected by the publication; at that time, Horne’s livelihood as a cabaret performer, earning rave reviews as she entertained

⁶² Renee C. Romano, *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 123-124; Seth Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind: A Crisis of Liberalism*, (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 43.

⁶³ Romano, *Race Mixing*, 196.

⁶⁴ Romano, *Race Mixing*, 150; Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 152; also see Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 20-30.

⁶⁵ “Billy Rowe’s Notebook,” *Courier* (Pittsburgh), September 30, 1950, 22, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002).

⁶⁶ Alvin Moses, “Harlem to Broadway,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, October 28, 1950, 20, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

⁶⁷ “Billy Rowe’s Notebook,” 22.

⁶⁸ “Billy Rowe’s Notebook,” 22; “Lena Horne to Paris Nightery in Record Financial Deal: Figure ‘Tops’ Best Jo Baker Received,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, July 22, 1950, 20, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

nightclubbers across Europe, remained uninfluenced by blacklists concerned with regulating American radio, Hollywood, and television.⁶⁹ However, even artists whose careers relied on international performances rather than domestic radio, film, and television engagements found their financial security threatened. In the early 1950s the State Department tracked its most outspoken critics among African American entertainers beloved by foreign audiences; specifically, the government targeted Josephine Baker and Horne's mentor Paul Robeson.⁷⁰

In July 1950, following Robeson's public denunciation of America's "'armed adventure in Korea,'" the State Department invalidated the performer's passport, "effectively denying [him] access to an international audience" and ruining him financially.⁷¹ Despite the demonization of Robeson in the United States, the activist-singer remained admired by American leftist circles and overseas audiences. Fearful that Robeson's popularity and outspoken criticism of America's domestic and foreign policy programs would draw global attention to racial discrimination at home and challenge America's self-representation as leader of the "free world" overseas, the State Department argued that "'Robeson's travel abroad at this time would be contrary to the best interests of the United States.'"⁷² As Robeson biographer Martin Duberman notes, like Walter White, most black leaders distanced themselves from Robeson, excepting W. E. B. Du Bois, who had publicly defended Robeson against White in the March 1950 issue of

⁶⁹ James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne* (New York: Atria Books, 2009), 221, 215; for reviews of Horne's appearances abroad, see "Lena Horne to Paris Nightery," 20; "Lena Horne Scores in London," *New York Times*, August 22, 1950, 40, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2002); Rudolph Dunbar, "Lena Horne Sits Londoners On Their 'Royal' Ears," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 7, 1950, B2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Rudolph Dunbar, "London Press Calls Lena Horne, 'Unbelievable, Tops,'" *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, September 9, 1950, 20, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, September 9, 1950, 21, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

⁷⁰ See Mary L. Dudziak, "Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War," *The Journal of American History* 81 (September 1994): 543-570 and Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 61-77.

⁷¹ Paul Robeson quoted in Dudziak, "Josephine Baker," 566; Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 61-62; see also Harding, Kelley, and Lewis, "We Changed the World," 453-454.

⁷² Dudziak, "Josephine Baker," 566.

Negro Digest.⁷³ No longer affiliated with the NAACP, Du Bois advocated peace and nuclear disarmament as chair of the Peace Information Center (PIC), an organization libeled as a Communist front. In February 1951, a Washington grand jury indicted Du Bois as “an agent of a foreign principle,” the Soviet Union. Although acquitted, Du Bois endured continuous government harassment and surveillance. As it had with Robeson, the State Department confiscated Du Bois’s passport in 1951, citing that his travels contradicted “in the best interest of the United States.”⁷⁴ For Horne, the revocation of her peers’ passports must have elicited concern. As a black star denied opportunities in Jim Crow America, Horne increasingly relied on international engagements for economic security. Despite continued efforts to escape the financial ramifications of pro-Communist allegations without publicly denouncing former allies, the American political climate, characterized by rising conservatism and anticommunism, increasingly constrained Horne’s available options.

Performing African American Anticommunism

During the Red Scare, many cold war liberals practiced “the dissociating business” as a means of distancing themselves from their earlier Popular Front connections.⁷⁵ As Victor S. Navasky suggests in his classic study of “informer subculture,” proof of cold war citizenship often required those accused of Communist sympathies to perform “the name-naming ritual” and, therefore, betray relationships.⁷⁶ Also, Navasky astutely notes “a *de facto* double standard” existed “when it came to blacks. Unlike whites, blacks interested in getting back to work were not automatically required or expected to name names. Instead, they had a number of options,

⁷³ Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 390; “Paul Robeson, Right or Wrong: Right, says W. E. B. Du Bois; Wrong, says Walter White,” *Negro Digest*, March 1950, 8-18.

⁷⁴ David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009), 690; Harold Bloom, ed., *W. E. B. Du Bois*, (New York: Chelsea House, 2001), 249; Painter, *Creating Black Americans*, 241; Amy Bass, *Those About Him Remained Silent: The Battle Over W. E. B. Du Bois* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 40.

⁷⁵ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 52-53.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 57, 74.

among which the most effective was to denounce Paul Robeson.”⁷⁷ Drawing on Navasky’s work, performance scholar Tony Perucci argues, “Robeson...became a vital resource to the ritual process of cold war loyalty and its performance during HUAC.”⁷⁸ By “disavowing ‘Paul Robeson’” before the committee, African Americans “performatively secure[d] their citizenship” and “affirm[ed] their loyalty to the United States.”⁷⁹ Perucci writes,

While most white witnesses were expected to name names before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, witnesses who were black were compelled to perform a more specific ritual: they needed simply to name Paul Robeson and their redemption was secured. It is evident, then, that the state needed Robeson to be a Communist since it relied so heavily on the signifying force of his name for ‘repentant’ blacks to name. But, for the Committee and in American culture more broadly, Robeson’s Communism was tautological, since it was *because* he was always already a Communist that his Communism needed to be constantly re-presented in order for it to maintain its signifying power. As a result, the Committee needed his name to have the citational force of referencing not simply a ‘Communist,’ but ‘The *African American* Communist,’ so that black witnesses would be able to name him, and only him, as a part of their compulsory loyalty ritual.⁸⁰

Following Robeson’s controversial antiwar speech at the Paris Peace Conference, HUAC expressed concern regarding the state of African American allegiance to the United States. Several black Americans performed this “compulsory loyalty ritual” naming Robeson before HUAC in order to absolve African Americans, as a group, of accusations of disloyalty; in asserting that Robeson did not speak for the majority of black Americans, these individuals implicitly suggested that they did speak for the group.⁸¹

In mid-July 1949, the Committee heard testimony from black witnesses meant to counter Robeson’s politics. Six prominent African Americans – HUAC investigator Alvin Stokes, former Communist turned HUAC informer Manning Johnson, Fisk University president Charles S.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁷⁸ Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 37.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 359-360.

Johnson, Guide Publishing Company president Thomas W. Young, Lester Granger of the NUL, and the Brooklyn Dodgers' celebrated second baseman Jackie Robinson – testified against Robeson.⁸² On July 18, 1949, Robinson initiated this “ritual process of cold war loyalty” by citing Paul Robeson before HUAC as a means of performing patriotism on behalf of the larger African American community. Robinson, whose landmark entry into major league baseball effectively desegregated the sport, in part owed his success to Robeson's support.⁸³ In a mark of respect for his advocate, Robinson referred to Robeson as ““a famous ex-athlete and a great singer and actor”” and questioned whether the press accurately represented the orator's Paris speech. Still, Robinson's testimony discounted Robeson's pro-Soviet antiwar statement on behalf of black Americans, “if [he] actually made [it],” calling the idea ““very silly.””⁸⁴ Robinson asserted ““Paul Robeson speaks only for Paul Robeson,”” yet protested that ““[he] has the right to his personal views, and if he wants to sound silly when he expresses them in public, that is his business and not mine.””⁸⁵ In his statement, Robinson challenged the notion that African Americans would object to taking up arms in a war against the Soviet Union, stating, ““I'd fight any aggressor – that includes any aggressor, including the Russians...who tries to take away from me my American heritage.””⁸⁶ With his testimony, Robinson established a ritualized demonstration of “authentic citizenship” that African Americans would reprise on the HUAC stage throughout the early 1950s.

On September 1, 1950, folk singer Josh White also “performatively secure[d his] citizenship” by denouncing Robeson before HUAC. Together with Horne, Hazel Scott, Canada

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁸⁴ *Hearings Regarding Communist Infiltration of Minority Groups*, July 13-18, 1949 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office) quoted in Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 360.

⁸⁵ Jackie Robinson quoted in “Jackie Robinson Pledges to Fight ‘Any Aggressor,’” *The Washington Post*, July 9, 1949, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994); *Hearings Regarding Communist Infiltration of Minority Groups* quoted in Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 360.

⁸⁶ Robinson quoted in “Jackie Robinson Pledges to Fight,” 5.

Lee, and Pearl Primus, anticommunists named folk singer Josh White as a “Comsymp” in late 1949; in June 1950, *Red Channels* also listed Scott, Lee, and White along with Horne as entertainers with Communist connections. Following the release of *Red Channels*, White appeared before HUAC on September 1, 1950 at his own request.⁸⁷ Fearing the consequences of blacklisting on his career, White performed the ritual denunciation of Robeson. The *Courier* reported that White “‘sang’ to” HUAC, “brand[ing] as both ‘wrong and an insult’ Mr. Robeson’s statement that Negroes would not fight against Soviet Russia or any other enemy.” On the stand, White stated, “the baritone [Paul Robeson] is kidding himself when he pretends to talk for a whole race. ‘I stand ready to fight Russia or any enemy of America’”⁸⁸ In his testimony, White avoided explicitly naming Robeson as a Communist, instead disavowing his alleged Paris Peace Conference assertion as many black liberals had already done; the folk singer reportedly viewed this omission as an act that “to some extent [kept] his honor intact.”⁸⁹

Following suit, Hazel Scott, jazz pianist and wife of Adam Clayton Powell Jr., also appeared before HUAC on her own behalf in an effort to refute the *Red Channels* charges. As she denied knowingly performing in support of Communist causes, Scott told the Committee that her “‘then employer and manager,’” Café Society owner, Barney Josephson, “‘often lent my name and time to affairs without consulting me.’”⁹⁰ In 1947, HUAC had summoned Josephson’s brother Leon, a suspected pro-Communist, to testify; citing his Fifth Amendment rights, Leon

⁸⁷ “‘Watch Those Reds’: Undercover Agent Gives Advice To Committee,” *Atlanta Daily World*, December 25, 1949, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World: 1931-2003; Cliff MacKay, “News in Tabloid,” *Afro-American*, December 31, 1949, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); “Josh White Sings: ‘Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue,’” *Courier* (Pittsburgh), City Edition, September 9, 1950, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier: 1911-2002.

⁸⁸ “Josh White Sings,” 6.

⁸⁹ Wald, *Josh White*, 193.

⁹⁰ Testimony of Hazel Scott Powell, transcripts from the Hearing before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., September 22, 1950, 3612, quoted in Karen Chilton, *Hazel Scott: The Pioneering Journey of a Jazz Pianist from Café Society to Hollywood to HUAC* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 145.

Josephson refused. Adjured with contempt, HUAC charged Leon Josephson with a ten-month prison term.⁹¹ As Scott biographer Karen Chilton notes, the pianist's reference to Josephson as her employer-manager resulted in accusations that she had "named names" before the Committee. Although HUAC never subpoenaed Barney Josephson, despite Café Society's CPUSA connections, his business floundered. Scott's statement ended her longtime relationship with Josephson.⁹² In addition to mentioning Josephson, Scott also drew on "the citational force" of Robeson's name to enact anticommunism. National Negro Press Association reporter Louis Lautier summarized the performer's testimony, writing, "Miss Scott also denied that she was a sponsor of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, a group which she was told, she said, collected money to feed and clothe Spanish orphan victims of the civil war. She admitted, however, that she had played one or two benefits for this group, but, after hearing 'disturbing talk' about the group's activities in 1943, she declined to play a joint benefit concert with Paul Robeson."⁹³ Given the anticommunist view that "Robeson's singing at an event *made* it Communist," Scott performed anticommunism through her alleged refusal to play alongside him.⁹⁴ Although neither Scott nor White blatantly described Robeson as following the Communist line, by merely mentioning Robeson's name before HUAC, they perpetuated the Committee's portrayal of Robeson as "The *African American* Communist" and used this signification to perform loyalty and ensure their clearance.

Beyond the theater of HUAC performance, many African Americans drew on the Robeson-naming ritual to do patriotism. In late 1950 and early 1951, famed boxer Sugar Ray Robinson assumed the role of "'Talking Good Will Ambassador' for Uncle Sam" as he toured

⁹¹ Chilton, *Hazel Scott*, 148.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 149.

⁹³ Louis Lautier, "Artist Asks To Testify Before House Committee: Hazel Scott Is Latest Star To Deny 'Red' Connections," *New Journal and Guide*, September 23, 1950, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Norfolk Journal and Guide (1921-2003).

⁹⁴ Perucci, "Red Mask of Sanity," 36.

Europe, countering the pro-Russia, antiwar, and antiracism positions espoused by Robeson, a man still greatly respected outside the United States.⁹⁵ The black press reported that “Robinson was angry when questioned about stories circulating abroad about racial discrimination in this country. He blamed the Communists for spreading such stories and said: ‘They are capitalizing on statements made by Paul Robeson. Mr. Robeson speaks for himself and not for the American Negro.’”⁹⁶ Likewise, in an essay appearing in the February 1951 issue of *Ebony*, NAACP executive secretary Walter White responded to the question: “‘How representative of Negro thought is Paul Robeson?’”⁹⁷ In “The Strange Case of Paul Robeson,” White pathologized Robeson’s politics, drawing on prevalent cold war discourses that “‘transformed political dissent into psychological distress [...and] a sign of mental illness.’”⁹⁸ Ultimately, White’s argues that the singer-activist is “more to be pitied than damned.”⁹⁹ However, White concludes,

It would be wise for the white world, instead of querying Negroes on their attitude toward Robeson, rather take stock of themselves. White America is more fortunate than it deserves to be in that there are so few Robesons as far as political beliefs are concerned. The extraordinary truth is that the overwhelming majority of Negroes have been wise enough to see Russia’s faults as well as those of the United States and to choose to fight for freedom in a faulty democracy instead of surrendering their fates to a totalitarian philosophy.¹⁰⁰

Reflecting the narrowing limits of politically acceptable cold war black protest, the collective censure of Paul Robeson by African American liberals as an affirmation of black national loyalty represents a tactical adoption of anticommunist, anti-Robeson rhetoric as a means of advancing a domestic civil rights agenda. By positioning Robeson on the margins of black American thought, black conservatives, like Jackie Robinson and “Sugar” Ray Robinson, and black liberals, like

⁹⁵ SWIG, “Sugar Ray’ Takes on a New Foe: Champ Hits Communist Propaganda,” *New York Amsterdam News*, City Edition, December 30, 1950, 24, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

⁹⁶ “Sugar Ray Robinson Hits Views Of Paul Robeson,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January, 7, 1951, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 394, 703n32.

⁹⁷ Walter White, “The Strange Case of Paul Robeson,” *Ebony*, February 1951, 78.

⁹⁸ Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 152, quoted in Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 21.

⁹⁹ White, “Strange Case of Paul Robeson,” 78.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

White, positioned themselves and their program of legalistic integration as necessities in the country's fight to contain Communism and response to international criticism of America's "faulty democracy."¹⁰¹

By 1951, HUAC had thoroughly institutionalized the linkage between black loyalty to the United States and vocal anti-Robesonism. As a close associate of Robeson facing scrutiny for her "pink" past, Horne sought to avoid a HUAC appearance. Instead she attempted to walk the narrow line of acceptable cold war politics by continuing to practice the "business of dissociation" she had adopted in late 1948. Without publicly and explicitly denouncing Robeson, Horne restaged her 1950 autobiographical performance in *In Person* by erasing his role in her political conversion.

Lena Horne's Own Story

As discussed in the prior chapters, Horne fashioned a postwar persona as the female equivalent of Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois. In 1947-1948, Horne's personal opinion column appeared alongside those written by Robeson and Du Bois in the *Voice*, a newspaper linked to Communists. Likewise, Horne had appeared with Robeson, performing songs and autobiographical acts at meetings for the Council on African Affairs and the Progressive Citizens of America, political organizations supported by the CPUSA. Whereas Paul Robeson remained at the height of his fame as "the pre-eminent African American" in 1946 and 1947, several dominant institutions – including the State Department and the mainstream mass media – had recast Robeson in the role of the infamous "un-American" by 1949 and 1950. Consequently, Horne's praise for Robeson, acceptable in 1947, signified differently when *In Person* appeared in bookstores in 1950.

¹⁰¹ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 109-110.

In addition to the pink hardback released by Greenberg publishers on October 12, 1950, *Tan Confessions* adopted Horne's autobiography as its first book-length serial, retitling it "Lena Horne's Own Story." In November 1950, Johnson Publishing Company, publishers of *Ebony*, introduced *Tan Confessions*; the inaugural issue included the first installment of the seven-part serialization of *In Person*. As Nowlie Rooks argues, "*Tan Confessions* offered elite African American women as protagonists" in confessional stories that promised to "focus on an aspect of African American life that was virtually ignored in the mainstream press, 'the happiness, triumphs, sorrows, and suffering of the troubled heart.'"¹⁰² Much like *Ebony*, Rooks suggests, Johnson's *Confessions* typically avoided discussion of racism and the civil rights movement during the late 1940s and 1950s, instead focusing on the lives of black celebrities, the achievements of individual African Americans, black consumerism, middle-class African American domesticity, "model citizenship," and racial progress.¹⁰³ Between November 1950 and March 1951, issue after issue of the magazine offered Lena Horne as its protagonist, reprinting the majority of *In Person* verbatim, chapter by chapter; however, the *Confessions* piece's silence on key components of Horne's self-fashioned persona, the few passages omitted from this reprinting, speak volumes.

Tan Confessions's April 1951 installment of "Lena Horne's Own Story" is a prime example of Johnson Publishing Company "doing anticommunism." *Confessions* expunges Horne's eleven-page homage to Paul Robeson found in chapter six of *In Person*.¹⁰⁴ The relationship earlier positioned as life changing, crucial to Horne's self-fashioned persona as a black performer of music and civil rights politics, is erased. Throughout the McCarthy era, cold

¹⁰² Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture that Made Them* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 127, 125.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁰⁴ Compare Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, "Lena Horne's Own Story," *Tan Confessions*, April 1951, 71 with Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 181-192.

warriors used conversionary language to frame the process of Communist politicization; in “The Strange Case of Paul Robeson,” Walter White wrote of “Robeson’s conversion” to pro-Sovietism.¹⁰⁵ In this context, the decision to exclude Horne’s earlier Robeson narrative, which credited her political conversion to his influence, from *Confessions* reflects the pervasive reach of 1950s anticommunism and Johnson Publishing Company’s capitulation to anti-Red fervor.

Similarly, *Confessions* excludes Horne’s reflections on her postwar activism and reasons for supporting an enduring Fair Employment Practices Committee as discussed in *In Person*’s final chapter.¹⁰⁶ Beginning in 1943, under the auspices of the National Committee for a Permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee (NCPFEP), established by black socialist A. Philip Randolph, African American leftists and liberals lobbied for legislation instituting a perduring FEPC at the national and the local level. Despite the NCPFEP’s propensity to exclude Communists from its ranks as early as 1946, red-baiters stigmatized the movement for a lasting FEPC, labeling it a “Communist-front organization.”¹⁰⁷ In May 1944, Mississippi Democrat John E. Rankin branded the Committee a “‘Communist bunch,’” adducing its employees’ “connections to ‘subversive,’ ‘un-American,’ and ‘Communist’ groups.”¹⁰⁸ By the early 1950s, anticommunists had fixed the supposed link between NCPFEP and the CPUSA. In an effort to squelch the proposal of a persistent FEPC, Georgia senator Richard Russell condemned the proposition as “‘a legislative monstrosity...which would destroy natural rights guaranteed every citizen by the Constitution.’”¹⁰⁹ As historian Timothy N. Thurber points out, Russell “alleged that FEPC was communist-inspired and would violate property rights, limit

¹⁰⁵ White, “Strange Case of Paul Robeson,” 78.

¹⁰⁶ Compare Horne, Arstein, and Moss, “Lena Horne’s Own Story,” 76, with Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 234-239.

¹⁰⁷ Horne, *Black and Red*, 70; Andrew Edmond Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War: The FEPC in the Midwest, 1941-1946* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 130.

¹⁰⁸ Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 129.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Russell quoted in Timothy N. Thurber, *The Politics of Equality: Hubert H. Humphrey and the African American Freedom Struggle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 73-74.

entrepreneurship, inhibit economic growth, waste taxpayers' money, undermine national foreign policy, take away the right to trial by jury, promote mixing of the races, create a bureaucratic 'thought police,' and give minority groups preferred status over whites for employment and promotion."¹¹⁰ At this historical moment, when the movement for a permanent FEPC signified a Communist-inspired plot, *Tan Confessions* performs anticommunism by silencing the singer's earlier support for the NCPFEPC.

As an international star accused of Communist sympathies, Horne's anti-racist autobiographical performances pushed at the boundaries of politically acceptable dissent. Now, red-baiters might view Horne's conversion narrative, which attributed Paul Robeson and his "fighting spirit" with teaching her "deep respect...for [her] own people" and inspiring her "to join actively in [their] struggle" – as evidence of conversion to the Communist camp.¹¹¹ Likewise, civil rights advocacy challenging the racist status quo, such as the active support of a permanent FEPC, offered ammunition for rabid red-baiters in their battle to quash dissent. *Confessions*, bending under the pressure of anticommunism, censored Horne through their re-scripting of her textual performance in *Lena*.

Lena Horne and the Lie?

As the *Los Angeles Sentinel* noted, Horne's "left-wing leanings [had largely] escaped public notice" as she performed abroad for British and French audiences.¹¹² For the most part, her career seemed unscathed by the "the blacklist mystique" unlike many of her progressive peers in the entertainment business.¹¹³ Upon returning to the United States, Horne looked to the "miraculous new world" of variety television, hoping to recommence her career in a medium that

¹¹⁰ Thurber, *The Politics of Equality*, 73-74.

¹¹¹ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 192-193.

¹¹² "An Idol Has Fallen," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 29, 1951, A1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

¹¹³ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 151.

promised to “Crack America’s Color Line.”¹¹⁴ At first, she remained unaffected by red-baiting, singing “Love” before an “estimated audience of 15 million” on the January 20, 1951 episode of Sid Caesar’s popular *Your Shows of Shows* (NBC).¹¹⁵ Her performance earned rave reviews; *Ebony* wrote, “*Show of Shows* producer Max Liebman called Lena’s performance ‘just fabulous.’”¹¹⁶ The next month, she performed renditions of “Where or When” and “Deed I Do” on the *Colgate Comedy Hour* (NBC).¹¹⁷ However, following Horne’s successful television appearances, damaging headlines lambasting the star’s “Communist sympathies” appeared once again. The *Sentinel* reported that the *Herald and Express*, a local daily, uncovered “photographic proof” linking Horne “with [actor Larry Parks,] an admitted ex-Communist,” at a “left-wing” Progressive Citizens of America rally in San Pedro, California held on July 31, 1948.¹¹⁸ As a result of Larry Parks’s confession of prior CPUSA membership before HUAC, the *Atlanta Daily World* conjectured that “Horne May Be Called By Activities Committee.”¹¹⁹ Likewise, the *Sentinel* predicted that, although Horne “has dodged congressional questioning...her time is obviously running short.”¹²⁰ Although HUAC never subpoenaed Lena Horne, the public increasingly questioned her past allegiances, her loyalty to the country that had elevated her to a position of prominence, and her “Red” reputation’s effect on the black civil rights struggle.

In “An Idol Has Fallen,” the *Sentinel*, Los Angeles’s black newspaper, decried:

It is deplorable that so talented and honored a person as Miss Horne doesn’t stick to her profession. It is more unfortunate that she is a

¹¹⁴ “Television: Negro Performers Win Better Roles in TV than in Any Other Entertainment Medium,” *Ebony*, June 1950, 22; Ed Sullivan, “Can TV Crack America’s Color Line: Noted Television Star Tells How Brotherhood is Being Brought into U.S. Living Rooms by Video,” *Ebony*, May 1951, 58-65.

¹¹⁵ Sullivan, “Can TV Crack America’s Color Line,” 58; S. W. Garlington, “The Amusement Row: Inside Briefs!!!” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 13, 1951, 20, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

¹¹⁶ Sullivan, “Can TV Crack America’s Color Line,” 58.

¹¹⁷ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 232.

¹¹⁸ “An Idol Has Fallen,” A1.

¹¹⁹ “Lena Horne May Be Called By Activities Committee,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 6, 1951, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

¹²⁰ “An Idol Has Fallen,” A1.

member of a group waging an uphill struggle for recognition. Her actions do little to promote the Negro cause. ...So, we wonder what any American, particularly one basking in the limelight of public approval, can see in the Soviet scheme of life. People like Lena Horne have successfully earned a fabulous income in their chosen field. How long would they hold on to their gains if the Reds sovietized America?¹²¹

A Kansan, identifying herself only as “The wife of an American Legionaire [sic],” expressed similar sentiments in an anonymous letter to J. Edgar Hoover, found in Horne’s FBI file. Along with *Counterattack*, *Aware*, and the rest of the “anti-Communist network,” the American Legion worked closely with the FBI, compiling and disseminating lists of suspected Communists and fellow travelers throughout the Red Scare.¹²² As Navasky argues, “Of all the extra-governmental agencies in the listing business, by far the most powerful, feared, and effective was the American Legion. After all, the Legion had 17,000 posts, 2,800,000 members and another 1,000,000 associates in its auxiliaries and was in a position to do damage.”¹²³ At the local level, the Legion often organized anticommunist campaigns to rid community institutions of ostensible Communist infiltration.¹²⁴ Moreover, the Legion “graylisted” suspected “Red” performers within the pages of *American Legion Magazine* and encouraged its members to write letters of complaint to the television shows, entertainment networks, and program sponsors that employed them.¹²⁵

The veteran’s wife from Ottawa, Kansas – incensed to learn from “Click” Cowger’s August 1951 *Sunflower Legionnaire* article “that Lena Horne, the bandleader and singer and actress, who has been affiliated with so many Communist Fronts (and I have her record) made four hundred thousand dollars last year” – enclosed the clipping with her letter to the FBI

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Ellen Schrecker, “The Communist Menace: An American Legion View” in *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 122; also see Kim E. Neilson, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), 194n60.

¹²³ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 86.

¹²⁴ Schrecker, “The Communist Menace,” 122.

¹²⁵ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 86.

director. She writes, “Why is it Leana [*sic*] Horne [is allowed] on the radio and in stories, etc. when her loyalty to our country is questioned?” Angered that “these actors” accused of Communist sympathies are “making thousands of dollars” while “American boys are fighting [Communism] in Korea,” the Legionnaire’s wife thinks Horne “and these others who are making money” as “Red” entertainers “should be investigated.”¹²⁶ In many instances, television and radio networks denied work to “controversial” entertainers accused by the Legion of Communist inclinations.¹²⁷ Still, Horne’s career remained intact, largely unharmed by the anticommunist accusations of Jack Tenney’s California State Senate Committee on Un-American Activities, *Red Channels*, and American Legionnaires.

In addition to governmental blacklisting bodies such as the FBI, the Tenney Committee, and HUAC as well as “free-lance blacklisters” like *Red Channels*, *Counterattack*, and the American Legion, a cadre of widely syndicated gossip columnists also wielded the power to name and absolve suspected Communists.¹²⁸ Walter Winchell of the New York *Daily Mirror*; Jack O’Brian, George Sokolsky, and Louella Parsons of William Randolph Hearst’s newspapers; as well as Hedda Hopper and Ed Sullivan of the New York *Daily News* listed and exculpated names.¹²⁹ In September 1951, Jack O’Brian attempted to bar Lena Horne from appearing on rival journalist Ed Sullivan’s *Toast of the Town* because of her “red leanings.”¹³⁰ For the first time since Horne initially faced accusations of “pink” proclivities in 1947, professional

¹²⁶ Anonymous to J. Edgar Hoover, August 3, 1951 in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹²⁷ Wald, *Josh White*, 183-184.

¹²⁸ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 85.

¹²⁹ Gail Lumet Buckley, *The Hornes: An American Family* (New York: Applause Books, 1986), 208; Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 233-237.

¹³⁰ Richard A. Jackson, “Lena Horne Near Victim of ‘Red’ Bugaboo: Almost Barred From TV Show,” *Afro-American*, September 22, 1951, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

anticommunists threatened the viability of her desired television career and the stability of her reportedly “fabulous income.”¹³¹

Sullivan’s *Toast of the Town* (CBS), a popular variety television show featuring talented entertainers, launched new careers and bolstered established ones. Horne had first appeared on the July 11, 1948 episode of Sullivan’s show and the emcee listed her as among “the greatest hits I’ve had on *Toast of the Town*.”¹³² With an upcoming *Toast* honoring Oscar Hammerstein II scheduled for September 9, 1951, Sullivan booked Horne to sing “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man.” In response, fervent anticommunist O’Brian “[threw] the book [*Red Channels*]” at Horne, Sullivan, WCBS-TV, and *Toast*’s sponsor Ford Motor Company, assailing ““the latest display of Sullivan’s booking genius”” in his New York *Journal-American* column.¹³³ In spite of O’Brian’s anti-Horne, anti-Sullivan tirade, many felt Lena Horne “scored a hit” when she overcame the “strong efforts to halt her booking” to perform in *Toast*’s Hammerstein tribute.¹³⁴

In reports following Horne’s appearance on *Toast*, the press revealed that the *Journal-American* had campaigned “to force Miss Horne off the show” because she “was somehow connected to the Communist Party.”¹³⁵ Newspapers indicated that Horne, who “denied allegations against her in ‘Red Channels,’” contested the *Journal-American*’s attempt to bar her

¹³¹ “An Idol Has Fallen,” A1.

¹³² Sullivan, “Can TV Crack America’s Color Line?” 58, 61; “Season 1, Episode 4, July 11, 1948: Lena Horne, Joe Howard, Joey Adams,” *Toast of the Town* Episode Guide, tv.com, available from <http://www.tv.com/the-ed-sullivan-show/july-11-1948-lena-horne-joe-howard-joey-adams/episode/993966/summary.html> (accessed April 29, 2011).

¹³³ John Roddy, “Attempt to Bar Lena Horne From TV Show Rebuffed,” *The Daily Compass* (New York), September 10, 1951, 3; also see “Winchell vs. Ed Sullivan,” *Afro-American*, June 7, 1952, 22K, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

¹³⁴ Roddy, “Attempt to Bar Lena Horne,” 3; Richard A. Jackson, “Lena Horne Nearly Barred From TV Show,” *Atlanta Daily World*, September 23, 1951, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); “Attempt to Bar Lena Horne from Television Show Fails: Paper Hints Star is Red Sympathizer,” *New Journal and Guide* (Norfolk), September 22, 1951, A22, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Norfolk Journal and Guide (1921-2003).

¹³⁵ Roddy, “Attempt to Bar Lena Horne,” 3; Earl Brown, “Lena Horne And The Lie,” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 6, 1951, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

performance by threatening to sue CBS for breach of contract.¹³⁶ Denying that it deserved a reputation as “one of the Red channels,” CBS vindicated Horne and Sullivan.¹³⁷ The network cited Horne’s prior television appearances as evidence of her acceptability among television executives and audiences; likewise, CBS championed its host’s “‘record over the years as a vigorous fighter of communism, subversives and all un-American activities.’”¹³⁸ Earl Brown of the *Amsterdam News* also issued a counterattack. In “Lena Horne And The Lie,” Brown challenged O’Brian’s denouncement of Horne’s politics as motivated by racism rather than anticommunism, arguing,

These bigots and these dumbbells (like foxes) are determined to make their kind of country out of America. Their objective is not only to smoke out the Communists but to crush liberalism. Anyone who speaks up for human justice today is called a Communist by these jackals of society. This is especially true in case of the Negro. ...Therefore, it is not impossible to see how an irresponsible columnist and a witch-hunting publication would smear Miss Horne because she has expressed her opinion about discrimination and other kinds of injustices and because she has tried to help abolish them. ...Their attack on upon her was really an attack upon us all.¹³⁹

Brown’s piece effectively highlights the connections between anticommunism and racism. As an “internationally-famous Negro singer,” Horne’s postwar censure of U.S. domestic and foreign policies challenged America’s self-representation as the “leader of the free world,” morally superior to Soviet Communism.¹⁴⁰ In an effort to silence Horne’s political protestations, the mass media, especially the conservative press, characterized the singer as a fellow-traveler or “Red” performer. By representing Horne as a “pinko,” the conservative mass media recast her anti-racist protest as Communist and, therefore, “beyond the bounds of legitimate dissent.”¹⁴¹ By

¹³⁶ Jackson, “Lena Horne Nearly Barred,” 2.

¹³⁷ “Hearst Press Off Again; This Time Vs. Lena Horne,” *Down Beat*, October 19, 1951, page unknown.

¹³⁸ Roddy, “Attempt to Bar Lena Horne,” 3.

¹³⁹ Brown, “Lena Horne And The Lie,” 8.

¹⁴⁰ Roddy, “Attempt to Bar Lena Horne,” 3.

¹⁴¹ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 107.

fashioning Horne's civil rights politics "Red" or "pink" rather than "black," conservative red-bashers stifled black political protest and hid their racism behind an anticommunist mask.

In "Lena Horne And The Lie," Brown also drew attention to the financial repercussions of blacklisting. "Today in America, if a man or a woman is called a Communist or even a fellow traveler," Brown wrote, "he is literally crucified, economically and otherwise. This is particularly true of actors and entertainers, whose success and income depend upon their popularity."¹⁴² Recognizing the threat blacklisting posed to her livelihood, Horne sought to clear her name. Merely practicing dissociation was no longer enough to protect her career. Following O'Brian's accusations, Horne succumbed to anticommunists, enacting clearance rituals to performatively demonstrate her loyalty to the United States.

Lena's Sound Doctrine?

Not one, but several, blacklists existed. Governmental bodies such as the Attorney General, FBI, Subversive Activities Control Board, and HUAC kept "unofficial" lists. Additionally, the American Legion, American Business Consultants, Aware, and several other red-baiting groups and individuals compiled their own rosters of "subversives." These groups offered their "expert" services to businesses, media networks, and advertisers looking to stamp out perceived Communist influence.¹⁴³ Upon the release of *Red Channels* in June 1950, no institutionalized "clearance" process existed.¹⁴⁴ As Navasky notes, "the blacklist was barely in business when it spun off an ancillary enterprise with yet more complicated rituals of its own, called 'clearance.' Getting off the blacklist soon became as ritualized as getting on: the principle distinction between the two enterprises was that one got on the list against one's will as

¹⁴² Brown, "Lena Horne And The Lie," 8.

¹⁴³ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 21-23, 86-89.

¹⁴⁴ Wald, *Josh White*, 177, 183.

punishment for adhering to one's values, whereas one got off as a reward for violating them."¹⁴⁵ By September 1951, exoneration involved the performance of "'increasingly stylized [loyalty] rituals.'"¹⁴⁶ Testifying before HUAC as a "friendly" witness and denouncing Paul Robeson represented just two of the "tests" suspected black Communists and "Comsymps" took to demonstrate their "repentance." Meeting privately with "free-lance vigilantes" – self-appointed anticommunist organizations, publications, and individuals – including, among others, columnist George Sokolsky, *Red Channels* publishers Kenneth M. Bierly and Theodore Kirkpatrick, and Hollywood labor leader Roy M. Brewer often resulted in a private or public endorsement that meant the difference between work and unemployment. Releasing press statements and writing letters of absolution also acted as acceptable forms of contrition.¹⁴⁷ Each of these "'rite[s] of purification'" required the accused to repudiate openly all past associations with the CPUSA or its "front" organizations, champion American democracy, proscribe Communism, and name names of the individuals who had "duped" her, a "well-intentioned liberal," into "unconsciously" promoting the Soviet line.¹⁴⁸

Despite claims denying existence of lists, rosters compiled by numerous blacklisting bodies proliferated, making exoneration difficult. Often, accused stars were forced to seek absolution from a number of anticommunist individuals, publications, and organizations before they were deemed employable. As Navasky points out, "The letter project, the Bierly clearance, the Brewer lunch, the Sokolsky mention, the anti-communist article, were all ways in which the graylisted, the 'innocent' or the 'duped' could go back to work."¹⁴⁹ Fearing further accusations

¹⁴⁵ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 87.

¹⁴⁶ Perucci, "Red Mask of Sanity," 30.

¹⁴⁷ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 86.

¹⁴⁸ Eric Bentley, ed., *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002), 947, quoted in Perucci, "Red Mask of Sanity," 30; *Red Channels*, 4, 2-3; Navasky, *Naming Names*, 88-89, 92.

¹⁴⁹ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 95.

would hamper her desired television, movie, and radio career, Horne ultimately conceded, performing several of these clearance rituals, including a secret conference with Sokolsky, a private meeting with Kirkpatrick, an anticommunist newspaper statement printed in Sullivan's column, and a clearance letter written to Brewer.

According to Horne's biographers, Horne sought the help of her advocates Ed Sullivan and Tex McCrary, the co-host with his wife Jinx Falkenburg of radio's "Tex and Jinx," one of the few radio shows that booked Horne during the Red Scare.¹⁵⁰ In 1950, McCrary, in his *Herald Tribune* column, had criticized the entertainment industry for surrounding Horne's promising career with a "frustrating fence."¹⁵¹ Sullivan and McCrary arranged a meeting for Horne with George Sokolsky; by meeting with Sokolsky, Horne performed the first of her several anticommunist performances.¹⁵² As one of the era's prominent red-baiting newspaper columnists, Sokolsky wielded the power to list and pardon suspected Communists and sympathizers through his column and various connections within the anticommunist network. Apparently, Horne received Sokolsky's endorsement – a first step in clearing her name.

Next, the singer sought public absolution from *Counterattack*'s Theodore Kirkpatrick, "Mr. *Red Channels* himself."¹⁵³ On October 9, 1951, Horne's manager Ralph Harris told John Roddy, reporter for the *Daily Compass*, "that Miss Horne conferred with Kirkpatrick to 'clean up once and for all the propaganda emanating from Counterattack' charging her with having been associated with 'subversive' causes and implying that she is therefore unfit to entertain Americans." Drawing on the cold war rhetoric that represented Communist beliefs as contagious

¹⁵⁰ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 235; Buckley, *The Hornes*, 221; James Haskins with Kathleen Benson, *Lena: A Biography of Lena Horne* (Chelsea: Scarborough House, 1991), 138. See also Lena Horne and Richard Schickel, *Lena* (1965; reprint, New York: Limelight Editions, 1986), 252, 255.

¹⁵¹ "Say Lena Horne's Career 'Fenced In' By Barriers," *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, January 28, 1950, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910 - 1975).

¹⁵² Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 235; Buckley, *The Hornes*, 221; Haskins with Benson, *Lena*, 138. Horne also discusses meeting with Sokolsky in Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 255-256.

¹⁵³ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 236.

and those who held them as mentally ill, Harris told Roddy that Kirkpatrick “‘has given [Lena Horne] a clean bill of health.’”¹⁵⁴ Although Kirkpatrick “usually require[d] a signed recantation of past sins and active espousal of militant anti-Communism” from the blacklisted, Harris assured Roddy that “the former G-man” had not “exact[ed] any other commitments from the singer.”¹⁵⁵ Of Horne’s activism, “‘She’s going to do exactly as she’s always done,’ Harris maintained, ‘Whenever a situation comes up that requires her help – a question of discrimination or something like that – she’ll do whatever she can. But she’ll try to avoid groups which are called subversive,’ he added.”¹⁵⁶ Despite this pledge that Horne would “not change her outspoken opposition to Jim Crow and oppression,” red-baiters successfully stifled Horne’s militancy; throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, she avoided taking controversial positions on civil rights in public.¹⁵⁷

In spite of Harris’s assurances that Kirkpatrick had cleared Horne without requiring her to issue a public denunciation of her past, Mr. *Red Channels* released a “scathing attack...against Communism, which Down Beat [*sic*] characterized as ‘a tirade worthy of Joe McCarthy himself,’” purportedly written by Horne.¹⁵⁸ Published in Ed Sullivan’s New York *Daily News* column on October 10, 1951, the Kirkpatrick statement read:

“No minority group in the country, within the past ten years, has made the advances scored by Negroes,” Lena Horne told Ted Kirkpatrick, of Counterattack, “and we would have made even greater advances if the Communists didn’t deliberately try to confuse the issues and stir agitation. Communism offers nothing to the Negro and the United States offers everything. If I could address young Negro performers, I’d warn them against allying themselves with Commie-front organizations; I’d warn them explicitly to resign immediately from any organization

¹⁵⁴ John Roddy, “Lena Horne’s Manager Says ‘Counterattack’ Clears Her,” *The Daily Compass*, October 9, 1951, 3; Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 22.

¹⁵⁵ Roddy, “Lena Horne’s Manager Says,” 3.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ “Lena Horne Cleared of Red Charge,” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 13, 1951, 2, 32, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993)

¹⁵⁸ E. B. Rea, “Encores ...and... Echoes,” *Afro-American*, November 17, 1951, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988)

infiltrated by Commies and above all, I'd warn them not to permit the use of their names on letterheads, until they check the sponsorship. The main thing for Negroes to do is fight actively against the Commies, not passively. That's what I intend to do, from now on. The World Series and even the playoff games dramatized the advance of the Negro, under the American system,' continued Lena. 'Jackie Robinson, Monte Irvin, Newcombe, Campanella, Mays and Henry Thompson are the best answers to Paul Robeson's agitation. Robeson, for whom I once had great admiration, does not speak for the American Negro, as Jackie Robinson told the House Committee on Un-American Activities and I would tell them, if invited. Agitators, however, will always be with us. The other night, an unauthorized group of whites from AGVA visited me to start trouble in night clubs which don't permit Negro patrons. I'll give you their names and you can check their Commie-front backgrounds.'"¹⁵⁹

This anticommunist statement mirrors those ritualized by other African Americans with “suspect” political views. It begins with the requisite acknowledgement of improved U.S. race relations – “the advance of the Negro” under American democracy – and condemnation of Communists for manipulating liberal African Americans to achieve their own ends. As historian Mary L. Dudziak highlights, the U.S. government countered Communist condemnations of continued racism by representing American race relations “as a story of progress, a story of triumph of good over evil, a story of U.S. moral superiority. The lesson of this story was always that American democracy was a form of government that made the achievement of social justice possible, and that democratic change, however slow and gradual, was superior to dictatorial imposition.”¹⁶⁰ In order to achieve “salvation,” accused African American often mimicked this story of progress and “Negro advancement.”

Like Josh White's HUAC testimony, which “advised all young artists look under the label of organizations to determine who uses them” so that they might avoid Communist “exploitation,” Horne's statement warned young black performers to avoid performing unwittingly for questionable or “subversive” groups by checking the organizations' political

¹⁵⁹ Ed Sullivan, “Little Old New York: Behind the Scenes,” *New York Daily News*, October 10, 1951, C14.

¹⁶⁰ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 13.

affiliations before giving their support.¹⁶¹ It also draws on the citational force of both Jackie Robinson and Paul Robeson's names in the ritualized "redemption" process. For, just as Paul Robeson signified "The *African American* Communist," Jackie Robinson signified "The *African American* patriot." By applauding Robinson's opposition to Robeson's politics and asserting that "Robeson, for whom [she] once had great admiration, does not speak for the American Negro" – Horne's press statement "performatively secured [her] citizenship." Finally, the press release promises that Horne will gladly name names – an act described by Navasky as "the litmus test, the ultimate evidence, the guarantor of patriotism" – if invited to testify before HUAC.¹⁶²

Horne biographer James Gavin suspects Kirkpatrick sought to "put Horne to convenient use as a black star on a soapbox against subversion." Gavin proposes that the newspaper statement came from the professional anticommunist rather than Horne, whose "vocabulary," he suggests, "did not include the word 'Commie.'" Similarly, Gavin suggests that Horne's "Robeson denunciation – which Kirkpatrick likely forced upon her – must have proven painful."¹⁶³ Still, although Horne's manager Ralph Harris vehemently denied that Horne offered to "name names," neither he nor Horne publicly disowned the Robeson condemnation or any other portion of the Kirkpatrick statement. On October 11, 1951, Harris told the New York *Daily Compass's* Marvel Cooke, a black CPUSA member who had worked with Horne on the *People's Voice*, that "'there was absolutely no discussion with Kirkpatrick about naming names.' Two years ago Miss Horne was asked to name Communists, Harris said, but she 'didn't know any names then and she doesn't know them now. She wouldn't name them if she did,' he

¹⁶¹ "Josh White Sings," 6.

¹⁶² Navasky, *Naming Names*, 28.

¹⁶³ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 236.

added.”¹⁶⁴ Given the falsity of this statement – Horne had worked against oppression alongside many known Communists during the late 1940s – the refusal to name names acted as a small rebellion against the “clearance apparatus” and the “informer subculture” it fostered.¹⁶⁵ In the end, the authorship of the statement is unimportant. By allowing the majority of the statement to represent her “doctrine,” Horne, in the words of Navasky, ultimately “strengthened the blacklist system.... For to agree to the ritual of rehabilitation was in the first place to acknowledge the legitimacy of the blacklists, to affirm publicly their values, to dignify and strengthen their moral position; in the second place it frequently meant implicating others – which was the heart of the process.”¹⁶⁶ In Horne’s case, it meant implicating Robeson and betraying a “life changing” friendship in order to secure her political and economic security.

Whereas the *Atlanta Daily World* applauded Horne’s anticommunist statement, E. B. Rea of the *Baltimore Afro-American* scorned it. Telling its readers, “Lena Horne, internationally beloved actress, has come forward with some advice which no Negro in America can afford to ignore,” the *Daily World* reprinted a portion of the statement as it appeared in Sullivan’s column, titling it “Lena Horne’s Sound Doctrine.”¹⁶⁷ The Atlanta newspaper focused on Horne’s endorsement of American democracy over Soviet Communism as well as her warning to young African American performers, leaving her reproof of Robeson unmentioned. In contrast, Rea of the *Afro-American* asked his readers: “Have you read Lena’s autobiography published last year? It not, dig up a copy and read the glorious praise heaped upon Paul Robeson under ‘Paul’s Fighting Spirit.’” Criticizing “the about-face attitude of Miss Horne, Hazel Scott, Josh White, and a few others” regarding Robeson, Rea condemns “the tan ‘top hands’ in both the

¹⁶⁴ Marvel Cooke, “Lena Horne’s Manager Says She’ll Refuse to ‘Name Names,’” *The Daily Compass*, October 11, 1951, page unknown.

¹⁶⁵ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 77, 95.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁶⁷ “Lena Horne’s Sound Doctrine,” *Atlanta Daily World*, October 16, 1951, 6, retrieved from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

entertainment and publicity fields,” who “are trying to talk out of both sides of their mouths.”¹⁶⁸

While some African Americans successfully proved their loyalty by publicly denouncing Robeson alone, Horne remained blacklisted in Hollywood despite her Sokolsky endorsement, Kirkpatrick pardon, and printed anticommunist diatribe.

“Most Sincerely, Lena Horne”

Although the television industry absolved Horne of her past “sins,” deeming her fit to perform for the American public, the singer discovered her name remained on Hollywood’s blacklist. According to author Kenneth Lloyd Billingsley, in 1953, Horne found herself barred from appearing in a Hollywood-sponsored benefit for Democratic presidential hopeful Adlai Stevenson because of her political past. As a result, Billingsley contends that Horne’s agent Jules Goldstone appealed to Hollywood “clearance maven” Roy M. Brewer on the singer-actress’s behalf. A representative of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IA) and a Motion Picture Industry Council (MPIC) board member, Brewer had earned a reputation as one of Hollywood’s most vigilant anticommunists with the power to “rehabilitate” former CPUSA members and fellow travelers.¹⁶⁹ Beginning in 1952, the Hollywood studios required employees with “questionable” politics to write letters exculpating themselves of “subversive” charges. Brewer acted as an unofficial clearance officer, screening letters written by “repentant” employees. Once convinced of the authors’ “conversion” from “subversive” to democratic political beliefs, Brewer often circulated the letters to governmental and self-appointed blacklisting bodies as proof of the writers’ absolution.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Rea, “Encores...and...Echoes,” 7.

¹⁶⁹ Kenneth Lloyd Billingsley, *Hollywood Party: How Communism Seduced the American Film Industry in the 1930s and 1940s* (Rocklin: Forum, 1998), 238, viii; Navasky, *Naming Names*, 87-88, 103.

¹⁷⁰ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 89-90.

In an effort to clear her name once and for all, Horne wrote a letter to Brewer “refut[ing]” the “misconception” that she “[had] said or done anything that might have been construed as being sympathetic toward Communism.”¹⁷¹ A “copy” of the Brewer letter “furnished to the Bureau” by George Sokolsky appears in Horne’s FBI file.¹⁷² Presumably supplied to the “nationally syndicated newspaper columnist” by the IASTE leader, Sokosky’s secretary forwarded a “photostat of [the] letter written by Lena Horne to Roy M. Brewer” to FBI Assistant Director Louis B. Nichols.¹⁷³ In response, Nichols thanked Sokolsky for sending “the communication from Lena Horne,” writing, “I find it very interesting.”¹⁷⁴ Just as Horne’s anticommunist newspaper statement enacted a prescribed loyalty ritual, the Brewer letter also practices a standardized rite of political “salvation.” As proof of their innocence, clearance arbiters expected the accused to discuss the accuracy of the charges leveled against them, explain when and why they supported politically “subversive” organizations, name and disavow those who invited them to join the CPUSA or “front” groups, convey their support of American democracy, and “promise not to do it again.”¹⁷⁵ Horne’s letter conforms to this ritual demonstration of deference to the blacklisting system.

Following her denial of Communist sympathies, Horne begins her letter by addressing the “great deal of curiosity concerning [her] friendship with Paul Robeson.” Like many “suspect” African Americans before her, Horne drew on the citational force of Robeson’s name to enact anticommunism. She writes, “I have heard it said many times that he influenced me sympathetically toward Communism. This I must emphatically deny.”¹⁷⁶ Drawing on the discourse of “American cold war psychoanalysis,” which linked Soviet sympathies to

¹⁷¹ Lena Horne to Roy M. Brewer, June 28, 1953 in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹⁷² “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹⁷³ Secretary to George E. Sokolsky to Louis B. Nichols, July 21, 1953 in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹⁷⁴ L. B. Nichols to George E. Sokolsky, July 28, 1953 in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹⁷⁵ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 92.

¹⁷⁶ Horne to Brewer in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

“psychological distress” in order to “contain dissent,” Horne describes her political “misdeeds” as motivated by “a serious personal crisis.”¹⁷⁷ She writes,

[...A]t the time I met Robeson, in 1940...I had begun to realize that I was being classified as a ‘lucky Negro’. I heard this from Negro leaders and read it in the press. I realized that there were many Negroes who hadn’t received the ‘breaks’ as I presumeably [*sic*] had. This became a very heavy burden resulting in an inferiority complex. I explained this problem to Robeson at the time and he suggested that I might help myself by taking an active interest in the problems of other people, generally, and in the Negro people, specifically. As an example, he recommended that I help raise money for a milk fund being sponsored by the Council For [*sic*] African Affairs for the benefit of African mothers. Paul Robeson, as I recall it, was an officer of the Council. Many similar benefit appearances followed there after [*sic*].¹⁷⁸

Horne, describing Robeson as “a man of great personal charm and sophistication,” insinuates that her own “inferiority complex” made her particularly susceptible to his political influence. Horne suggests that under Robeson’s sway, she – a young “innocent” confused by her newfound fame and success – mistakenly lent her talents and time to “front groups” such as the Council on African Affairs. In order to perform cold war loyalty, she fashions her postwar activism as motivated by “personal crisis,” rather than the collective struggle against oppressive forces of racism, colonialism, capitalism, anti-Semitism, and anticommunism. By replicating hegemonic cold war narratives, which “translat[ed...] political and social problems into individual, personal ones,” Horne, in the words of cold war historian Elaine Tyler May, “undermined the potential for political activism and reinforced the chilling effects of anticommunism and the cold war consensus.”¹⁷⁹ Although the Brewer letter never explicitly names Robeson as a Communist, Horne performs loyal citizenship by drawing on citational force of his name to signify “the *African American Communist*.” In addition to challenging the basis of her relationship with

¹⁷⁷ Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 21; Horne to Brewer in “Horne,” FBI 100-353031.

¹⁷⁸ Horne to Brewer in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹⁷⁹ Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 20; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), xxv.

Robeson, the the majority of Horne's handwritten, twelve-page letter restages her earlier autobiographical performance by retracting *In Person*, describing it as a Communist project of her "friend" Carlton Moss.

In April 1951, at the height of "the mass naming of names," HUAC subpoenaed Hollywood agent, story editor, and ex-Communist Meta Reis Rosenberg.¹⁸⁰ Appearing as a "friendly" witness, Rosenberg named seven "previously unidentified" Hollywood Communist cell members – F. Edward Biberman, Herbert Biberman, Francis Faradoh, Dorothy Trees, Michael Uris, George Willner, and – particularly damning for Horne – Carlton Moss.¹⁸¹ Although, Moss "exiled himself from the film industry" before Rosenberg revealed his CPUSA affiliation, his role as Horne's autobiographical co-author, threatened Horne's employability within the movie industry.¹⁸² In an effort to salvage her reputation and career, Horne disclaims *In Person*'s textual Horne as the invention of the insidious Moss.

In the greater part of the Brewer letter, Horne self-represents as a "lonely" innocent, who upon moving to Hollywood in the early 1940s, is duped by the "cold-blooded" Moss into supporting a variety of "inappropriate" groups, including the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions (HICCASP) and the committee for a permanent FEPC – both suspected Communist "front" organizations.¹⁸³ Horne's self-diagnosis parrots Walter White's earlier "psychological" analysis of Robeson's politics as motivated by his

¹⁸⁰ Navasky, *Naming Names*, 69, 229.

¹⁸¹ Williard Edwards, "Literary Agent Names 7 More as Movie Reds," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 14, 1951, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849-1987); Navasky, *Naming Names*, 133, 139, 141, 174; also see "Hollywood Four Refuse Replies to Red Inquiry," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1951, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881-1987) and Murrey Marder, "Witness Was In Hollywood 'Cell,' Names More as Reds," *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1951, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994).

¹⁸² Joseph McBride, *Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 584.

¹⁸³ Horne to Brewer in "Horne," FBI File 100-353031.

personal “‘over-sensitiv[ity]’ to discrimination.”¹⁸⁴ She writes, “I now realize that Carlton played upon my racial insecurities, and made me overly sensitive to each slight and injustice to Negroes to the point where I was quite willing to appear for any cause that might aid them.”¹⁸⁵ Here, the singer draws upon dominant constructions of the successfully “mislead” as “‘lonely’” and “‘psychologically damaged people’” to perform innocence.¹⁸⁶ She suggests that she realized the disingenuity of her “friendship with Carlton” too late, after he already “had [her] complete confidence” and convinced her to let him pen “a biography of [her] for publication.”¹⁸⁷

Although Horne tells Brewer that she originally consented to working with Moss on the proposed “biography,” she asserts that Greenberg ultimately printed *In Person* without her “knowledge,” “permission,” or “approv[al] of the final draft.”¹⁸⁸ In the letter, Horne denounces the book as the unauthorized, fictionalized work of her insidious collaborator, calling it “distasteful” and “foreign to [her] way of thinking” for emphasizing “only the inequalities that happened to [her] as a Negro woman.”¹⁸⁹ She tells Brewer that she vowed to Moss and *In Person*’s publisher that she “would do everything [she] could to stop its sale.”¹⁹⁰ Despite Horne’s alleged dissatisfaction with *In Person*, Horne never publicly condemned the book as an untruthful autoportrait at the time of its release. In fact, in October 1950 when *In Person* debuted, Horne allowed it to stand as representative of her autobiographical self.

Upon *In Person*’s publication, the black press praised the as-told-to autobiography as a “frank and appealing book” detailing the Horne’s “long and at times most disappointing struggle

¹⁸⁴ Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 22.

¹⁸⁵ Horne to Brewer in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹⁸⁶ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (1949; reprint, Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1962), 104-105, quoted in Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 24.

¹⁸⁷ Horne to Brewer in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

for success” as well as “the growth of [her] social consciousness.”¹⁹¹ The *Cleveland Call and Post* applauded the textual Horne of *In Person* for her refusal to minimize her experiences with discrimination, writing, “It isn’t a pretty story for the history of a country which brags about its democratic advantages.”¹⁹² *In Person*’s Horne highlighted her struggles against racism and challenged America to live up to the principles it professed to value. As mentioned above, *In Person* lauded Robeson’s role in raising Horne’s anti-racist consciousness; although red-baiters might construe this positive depiction of Robeson as evidence of Horne’s “un-American” politics, the majority of *In Person* enacts a liberal black political agenda, advocating for the inclusion of African Americans within the America’s existing democratic system. Still, during the Red Scare, anticommunists viewed any avowal of racial equality or prescription for civil rights reform, however centrist, as suspect. Cold war conservatives viewed challenges to the status quo as tantamount to “subversion,” a probable indication of the challenger’s Communist beliefs.¹⁹³

Although we will never know which narrative construction of Horne’s life – *In Person* or the Brewer letter – more accurately represents the “truth” surrounding the 1950 autobiography, the quest for Horne’s “real” life-story is not my concern. Instead, I am interested in the slippages between these two portraits of Horne, both of which intended their audience read them as “true” representations of the star. However, that Horne allowed *In Person* to persist as an “accurate” autobiographical performance upon its publication in 1950, as well as the text’s conformity to Horne’s earlier self-representations in 1947, 1948, and 1949, suggests that Horne viewed the

¹⁹¹ Gertrude Martin, “Book Reviews,” review of *In Person: Lena Horne* by Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, *The Chicago Defender*, December 12, 1950, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); “Lena’s Story Not a Fantasy,” review of *In Person: Lena Horne* by Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, *Afro-American*, January 6, 1951, 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

¹⁹² Review of *In Person: Lena Horne* by Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, *The Cleveland Call and Post*, October 21, 1950, 7B, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Call and Post (1934-1991).

¹⁹³ Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 36.

memoir as representative of her autobiographical voice at one point in her life, if not at the time she composed the Brewer letter in 1953.

In the end, Horne draws on popular constructions of “Reds” as “masters of deceit,” and fellow travelers as mentally distressed individuals susceptible to “Communist duplicity” to enact “repentance” for Brewer.¹⁹⁴ She performs the clearance ritual by writing,

When I looked back at the time [when *In Person* appeared] on my friendship with Carlton, I also realized that the many activities I had assumed under his influence were all part of the same pattern of lies and betrayal. I also recalled then, that back in 1941 – a man named Pettis Perry, introduced to me by Carlton, had hinted to me that it might be a good idea for me to join the Communist party. I of course was not interested and told him so – the idea being so incongruous that it never occurred to me that this also was part of Carlton’s program for me.

After the incident of the book, I never saw or talked with Carlton Moss again.

The shock of the revelation, to say the least, was enough to awaken in me the realization that Carlton was trying to use me in the classic pattern which the Communists design for minority people. I am angry that this happened to me. I am angry that I did not immediately see through this pattern. The shock and anger awakened me to the need of being more discerning and to channel my energies in more appropriate directions.¹⁹⁵

In the above passage, Horne enacts the “salvation” rituals prescribed by anticommunists. She names and rejects Carlton Moss and Pettis Perry’s politics as well as their invitations to join the Communist party. Following the conviction of eleven prominent CPUSA officers under the Smith Act, African American Communist Pettis Perry assumed interim leadership of the party in 1950. Like his compatriots, Perry also faced arrest and indictment for conspiracy under the Smith Act in June 1951. In February 1953, the court found Perry guilty, sentencing him to three years in federal prison.¹⁹⁶ Although Horne may have felt vindicated in her refusal to name new names,

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22, 23.

¹⁹⁵ Horne to Brewer in “Horne,” FBI File 100-353031.

¹⁹⁶ “Biographical/Historical Note,” Pettis Perry Papers, 1942-1967, The New York Public Library, available from <http://www.nypl.org/archives/3901> (accessed June 9, 2011); Harvey Klehr, “Pettis Perry,” *African American National Biography*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Oxford African American*

Horne ultimately yields to the blacklisting apparatus by mentioning Robeson's name, along with those of known Communists Moss and Perry. In her attempt to performatively secure her own innocence, she affirms the blacklisting system that hunts political progressives such as Robeson, Moss, Perry, and herself.¹⁹⁷

In the end, Horne's letter represents a ritualized performance of clearance. She takes the required step of "promising not to do it again" by assuring Brewer that she has learned to practice discernment and to "channel [her] energies in more appropriate directions." She then concludes the letter with the requisite pledge of loyalty to the United States, writing, "I have always known that America offers the greatest chance to all people, to achieve human dignity – and since this terrible experience I am more determined than ever to do what I can to impress these principles on the thinking of all people I come in contact with." Self-representing as a "repentant" convert to anticommunism, Horne ultimately fashions a new persona as a disciple of democracy and a "Good Will Ambassador for Uncle Sam." In order to negotiate cold war politics, Horne dons this image for the greater part of the next decade.

Conclusion

In March 1951, the *Los Angeles Sentinel's* "An Idol Has Fallen" had enjoined the "glamorous" and "honored," yet ideologically-suspect Lena Horne to abandon politics and "stick to her profession."¹⁹⁸ This plea echoes earlier appeals to Paul Robeson, asking the increasingly

Studies Center, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/opr/t0001/e0937> (accessed June 9, 2011).

¹⁹⁷ In *Lena*, biographer James Haskins quotes Horne on the Brewer letter. He writes, "[Lena] found herself drummed out of the Screen Actors' Guild. 'This shook up the bosses at MGM and they insisted I write the union a letter clearing myself,' she told Arthur Bell of the *Village Voice* in 1981. 'The letter said, 'I'm black. I have these friends. I don't know anything about their politics.'" Nevertheless, MGM didn't put me back to work.'" See Haskins with Benson, *Lena*, 133.

¹⁹⁸ "An Idol Has Fallen," A1.

politicized singer to forgo activism and “go on being Paul Robeson.”¹⁹⁹ Although Robeson is unmentioned in “An Idol Has Fallen,” his “signifying force” as “The *African American Communist*” pervades the text.²⁰⁰ In 1949, a *New York Times* editorial read,

Mr. Robeson has advanced the cause of the American Negro by being an outstanding human being. He can do nothing but harm by making himself a propagandist for a party line. We do not believe that making speeches of any sort can do as much for the American Negro as is being done by great American Negroes who in their own personalities demonstrate how hollow is prejudice and how ill-grounded is discrimination. Nothing that Mr. Robeson can say will be half as important as the very fact of the existence of...Paul Robeson.²⁰¹

As Mary Cygan suggests, the *Times* editorial “gave Robeson one last chance to reassume [his] old role” as “the pre-eminent African American,” a “great American Negro,” who acted as, in the words of Martin Duberman, “proof that a ‘deserving’ black man could make it in the [white American] system.”²⁰² Unlike her mentor, who refused to quiet his criticisms of American racism, Horne surrendered to the fervor of the Red Scare. She enacted ritualized anticommunist performances by publicly denouncing her friendships, restaging her autobiographical identity, and refashioning her postwar political persona in order to “go on being Lena Horne,” the stunning and successful African American singer-star. By adopting these anticommunist performance strategies, Horne ultimately reinforced the conservative and red-baiting politics of the dominant cold war society as she undercut the significance of her earlier activist convictions. As I will discuss in the following chapter, Horne – a victim of red-baiting – tempered her militancy. She spent the next decade largely relying on “the very fact of [her] existence” – cultivating her image as a beautiful, talented, and financially successful black singer, celebrated by white Americans – to “demonstrate how hollow is prejudice and how ill-grounded is

¹⁹⁹ “The Case of Paul Robeson,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1949, 22, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2007).

²⁰⁰ Perucci, “Red Mask of Sanity,” 37.

²⁰¹ “Case of Paul Robeson,” 22.

²⁰² Cygan, “Man of His Times,” 87; Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 342.

discrimination.” Still, a close reading of Horne’s performances between 1954 and 1962 reveal the singer-actress’s continued, though restrained, dissent in the face of Jim Crow politics.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING UP THE BEAUTY AMBASSADOR

Lena Horne Cosmetics and the Democratization of Black Beauty

“You let us fight for equality. You keep charming the world,” they told her. “If you get into the fight, you’ll destroy yourself and, after all, you’re doing the race more good just by being Lena Horne than you could by stepping out of the role of entertainer and fighting for us.” She agreed reluctantly.¹

Targeted by cold war conservatives for her postwar performance of political militancy, Horne’s outspoken “fight for equality” threatened to “destroy” her career as well as her continued cultural legitimacy as white America’s symbol of professed racial tolerance and as middle-class black America’s goodwill ambassador, whose beauty, charm, and talent purportedly paved the way for integration with white society.² During the mid-1950s, the black press proposed Horne retreat from the world of traditional politics. They suggested that “‘just by being Lena Horne,’” she would uplift the race, and, as Duke Ellington expounded in 1952, “being Lena means being pretty.”³ In the wake of censure from conservative cold warriors, the black press urged Horne to reprise her wartime role as the beautiful “symbol of [her] race,” who by “sing[ing] her song in the inimitable Horne manner and with a personality that is impossible to resist [...made] her own quiet and effective contribution” to the struggle for integration.⁴ They required Horne mute her critiques of Jim Crow and enjoined her to assume the symbolic role of black “beauty ambassador,” with the primary duties of “being pretty” and diplomatically “charming the world.”⁵ As *the* African American beauty ambassador, Horne was constructed as

¹ Alfred Duckett, “Fabulous Lena Horne Rivals That ‘Tree Growing In Brooklyn’ Says Scribe Who Saw Her Blossom Out: Hollywood, Recognizing Her Early Talents Had Scouts Checking Daily,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, August 28, 1954, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

² *Ibid.*

³ Duke Ellington, “The Most Exciting Women I’ve Known,” *Ebony*, April 1952, 28, 30.

⁴ David Hanna quoted in “A Symbol-A Realist: Lena Horne Thinks of Race,” *The Kansas City Call*, June 9, 1944, 7.

⁵ Other scholars use the concept of “beauty ambassadors.” In her dissertation, Lindsey Feitz uses the term “beauty ambassadors” to describe Avon saleswomen and their role “as ambassadors of the U.S. nation-state both in formal

either a token of white America's racial tolerance or as a symbol of black middle-class beauty, respectability, and consumer-citizenship, meant to engender race pride and expedite integration.

Through her postwar autobiographical performances, Horne worked to replace her Hollywood persona as "the 'colored glamour girl'" – merely a pretty face – with one of a committed activist.⁶ Within an oppressive cold war society, both the dominant mass media and the black press – especially the new popular black magazines – relegated Horne to the objectifying role of "just being pretty." Within the white-controlled mass media, an image of Horne as "the most beautiful woman in the world" seemingly untouched by racism circulated throughout the fifties and early sixties.⁷ This dominant representation of Horne exemplifies a departure from long held notions of African Americans as biologically inferior to whites; it suggested that token black Americans, like Horne, could achieve success and notoriety through sheer determination and hard work in an increasingly colorblind American democracy. This white-controlled image allowed white Americans to accept the persistence of racial inequality as an ostensible consequence of overall black cultural inferiority, with exceptions like Horne and

and informal contexts." Feitz argues that Avon "consistently conflated women's ability to buy, sell, and wear make-up as an extension of democracy and a benefit of a free market economy." Especially during the cold war, when American culture constructed women's domestic obligations as patriotic onuses, the cosmetics company positioned its sales "ladies" as beauty ambassadors. As "lipsticked guardians of the nation," Avon Ladies were responsible for the transnational spread of American democracy and free enterprise by promoting Avon's prescription for achieving beauty, femininity, and modernity. See Lindsey Feitz, "Democratizing Beauty: Avon's Global Beauty Ambassadors and the Transnational Marketing of Femininity, 1954-2000" (PhD Dissertation, University of Kansas, 2010), 4-14. Although Tiffany M. Gill does not use the term "beauty ambassadors" in *Beauty Shop Politics*, she discusses the role of "Negro Beauticians as Ambassadors" during the cold war. Gill argues that African American beauticians – by performing middle-class respectability, fashionability, professionalism, and "loyalty to capitalism" on their "beauty pilgrimages" abroad – promoted "the goodness of American democracy to African Americans when all the while one of their major goals was to dismantle racism within their industry and pursue a civil rights agenda once they returned home." See Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 82-97.

⁶ Lena Horne as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, *In Person: Lena Horne* (New York: Greenberg Press, 1950), 231.

⁷ "Most Beautiful," *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, April 1, 1950, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975). ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); "The World's Sexiest Negro Women," *Jet*, December 27, 1951, 34-35; "The Complete Life of Lena Horne," *Pocket Celebrity Scrapbook*, no. 8 (New York: Pocket Magazines, Inc., 1955), 26-28.

other black “firsts” supposedly proving white America’s racial tolerance.⁸ At the same time, the black press fashioned Horne as a symbolic goodwill ambassador with the role of “being pretty” and, in the words of Duke Ellington, ““advertising to the world that [black] people can be beautiful, inside and out.””⁹ Throughout this period, the dominant mass media and the popular postwar black periodicals similarly objectified Horne as a living “advertisement” meant to promote their disparate agendas of maintaining the status quo and advancing integration, respectively. Enjoined to “just be Lena,” to “just be pretty,” Lena Horne struggled throughout the fifties and early sixties to take control of this reductive image of Horne the glamour girl.

Although many theorists, in the tradition of John Berger and Laura Mulvey, argue that glamour is used to fetishize, objectify, and exploit women within representation, several scholars suggest that glamour, depending on its use, has the potential to empower women. In their discussion of white Hollywood stars Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, film scholars Florence Jacobowitz and Richard Lippe argue, “Glamour can be used in [a] progressive way, in conjunction with certain stars, who control the meaning of or the conditions surrounding glamour.”¹⁰ Similarly, in his history of glamour, Stephen Gundle suggests, “glamour is uniquely appealing as a source of self-definition and even empowerment.”¹¹ In her efforts to resist her continued objectification, Horne embraced the performance of black glamour. Although Horne had earlier criticized her glamorous image as frivolous, objectifying, and depoliticizing, in this chapter, I argue that Lena Horne sought to empower herself by performing glamour.

⁸ See Lawrence D. Bobo and Ryan A. Smith, “From Jim Crow Racism to Laissez-Faire Racism: The Transformation of Racial Attitudes” in *Beyond Pluralism: The Conception of Groups and Group Identities in America*, eds. Wendy F. Katkin, Ned Landsman, and Andrea Tyree, 182-220 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 185-186, 195, 212-213. Also see, Margaret L. Andersen and Howard F. Taylor, *Sociology: The Essentials*, 6th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2011), 243.

⁹ “Duke Names Lena Horne, Eleanor Roosevelt As Very Exciting Women,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 13, 1952, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

¹⁰ Florence Jacobowitz and Richard Lippe, “Empowering Glamour,” *Cineaction* 26/27 (1992): 3.

¹¹ Stephen Gundle, *Glamour: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, many critics commented on Horne's new performance style, which scholar Shane Vogel describes as, "offering no self" – "not love but hostility, not warmth but aloofness, not presence but absence, not immediacy but hesitation, not touch but distance, not an old friend but a stranger."¹² Although Vogel convincingly argues that Horne strategically performed aloofness and impersonality to "resist the circumscribed roles available to black women on the Jim Crow stage," I believe he overlooks the significance of Horne's performance style as a strategic performance of glamour.¹³ Many scholars, in their attempts to define the elusive concept of glamour, use the very terms Vogel and others evoke to describe Horne's "impersona." Glamour, they argue, involves the projection of icy indifference.¹⁴ It is "untouchable," contingent on "what is withheld."¹⁵ As Gundie maintains, "Glamour is a weapon and a protective coating."¹⁶ By cultivating an aloof singing style dependent on the performance of glamour, Horne appropriated and empowered her glamorous image; by performing glamour, Horne attempts, as Vogel suggests, to "resist the interracial intimacy" produced by the segregated cabaret and the expectation that she display "black female interiority" for her white audiences.¹⁷

During this period, Horne also embraced the performance of glamour in order to fashion a persona as the spokeswoman for her own beauty line, Lena Horne Cosmetics. Although seemingly apolitical or even counterpolitical, I argue that Horne's short-lived and previously unstudied cosmetics venture reflects an extension of her postwar political ideals and, at the same time, the limitations she faced as an African American woman and former political progressive

¹² For example, see "Lena Horne's New Singing Style," *Ebony*, October 1950, 35-36; "Comeback for Lena Horne" *Ebony*, August 1951, 29-32. Shane Vogel, "Lena Horne's Impersona," *Camera Obscura* 67 23, no. 1 (2008): 33, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Wilson, "A Note on Glamour," *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 1 (2007): 106, Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 5, 18.

¹⁵ Wilson, "A Note on Glamour," 101.

¹⁶ Gundie, *Glamour*, 4.

¹⁷ Vogel, "Lena Horne's Impersona," 18.

constrained by a repressive cold war culture.¹⁸ With her access to the “traditional” political arena restricted by a fervently anticommunist society, Horne sought to manipulate and liberate her glamour girl image to resist racism as well as to empower – socially, politically, and economically – herself and other black women.

In *In Person*, Lena Horne had publicly sought to dispute the notion that she possessed exceptional beauty for a black woman, suggesting that “Colored America” offered “an endless array” of attractive “Negro girl[s].”¹⁹ Still, in spite of her protestations, both the dominant and black presses continued to pigeonhole Horne as a symbolic beauty ambassador, enjoining her to return to “just being pretty.” Objectified by both the black and white mass media as the perfect specimen of African American beauty (explicitly or implicitly), Horne sought to manage the association of black beauty with her name by introducing Lena Horne Cosmetics in the late 1950s. By launching her own cosmetics line, I argue that Lena Horne sought to regulate the circulation of her name and likeness. Adopting the persona of beauty expert, Horne suggested that attractiveness resulted from “seeming pretty,” rather than “being pretty.”²⁰ She implies that her beauty resulted from “making up” and not her inherent makeup.

Through Lena Horne Cosmetics, Horne supported the democratization of a specifically African American beauty by underlining its performative aspect. She challenged the belief that she enjoyed a natural beauty that far outstripped other black women by suggesting all African American women – whether as saleswomen or consumers – had the democratic right, ability, and responsibility to perform black beauty ambassadorship through the purchase and application of the Lena Horne line of beauty products. With Lena Horne Cosmetics, Horne advocated black

¹⁸ Although Jessie Carney Smith mentions Lena Horne Cosmetics in a reference article, this is the first study of Horne’s cosmetics enterprise. See Jessie Carney Smith, “Cosmetics,” *Encyclopedia of African American Popular Culture*, vol. 1, ed. Jessie Carney Smith, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 374.

¹⁹ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 204.

²⁰ Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000), xvii.

women make up as a route to achieving economic independence, consumer-citizenship, and integration. She made her culturally prescribed ambassadorial mission to facilitate integration by performing beauty the obligatory mission of all black women.

The Politics of Black Beauty

As Kathy Peiss, Maxine Leeds Craig, and other scholars argue, throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, “beauty culture was explicitly a political issue” for African American women; the consumption of makeup and cosmetics – including controversial skin lighteners and hair straighteners – highlighted politicized debates surrounding racial pride, respectability, and integration as well as white supremacist beauty ideals, charges of self-hatred, and allegations of white emulation.²¹ Horne, in *Lena* (1965), along with several of her biographers, suggest the fifties mark a period of apoliticization – or even accommodation, complacency, and racial disidentification – in the singer’s life. While some might assert that Horne retreated from the realm of “traditional” politics (a questionable assertion in itself), I, like Robin D. G. Kelley, believe we must “break away from traditional notions of politics” as well as notions of “‘authentic’ movements and strategies of resistance” if we are to understand the “diverse struggles waged by black [Americans] during the twentieth century.”²² Through *Lena Horne Cosmetics*, I suggest Horne engaged and sought to resist the politics behind racialized beauty standards by endeavoring to expand definitions of black beauty to include women that did

²¹ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Owl Books, 1999), 7; Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 18. Also see Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women’s Consciousness* (New York: NYU Press, 2000); A’Lelia Perry Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C. J. Walker* (New York: Scribner, 2001); Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003); Susannah Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); and Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics*.

²² Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 4.

not look like Lena Horne. At the same time, Horne attempted to economically empower black women. Revenue from Lena Horne Cosmetics offered Horne an alternative to her primary source of income; as a professional singer performing for white audiences in white-owned cabarets, Horne largely relied on white America for her income. With Lena Horne Cosmetics, Horne attempted to tap into and support the growing black market, while lessening her reliance on the white market to support herself and her family. At the same time, Horne sought to create entrepreneurial opportunities for black women. By offering alternatives to domestic or secretarial work, Lena Horne Cosmetics promised black women economic autonomy free from white surveillance and economic dependence.

As scholar Tiffany Gill contends, “Historically, black women in America have had a complicated relationship to beauty standards.”²³ In order to uphold white supremacy, the dominant culture simultaneously fashioned glamorous white women as at once pretty, sexual, and respectable – the embodiment of idealized beauty – and black women as unattractive, hypersexual, and unrespectable – “failed” women “in unacceptable bodies.”²⁴ In this context, the mass media’s acceptance of Lena Horne as a token black beauty within its pantheon of white glamour girls represented a symbolic triumph. In many ways, white America’s recognition of Horne’s beauty represented a hollow victory; the dominant mid-century representation of Horne as the world’s most beautiful woman reinforced sexism, classism, and colorism as it promoted colorblind racism. Still, Horne’s image did pose a significant challenge to long-disseminated representations of black women as ugly, oversexed, and disreputable – what Craig identifies as white America’s “wholesale definition [of black women] as non-beauties.”²⁵

²³ Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics*, 3.

²⁴ Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen*, 24-25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

“The Most Beautiful Woman in the World”

On the one hand, the dominant liberal mass media upset long held stereotypes of African American women as unattractive, hypersexual, and depraved by celebrating Horne’s embodiment of beauty, sexual allure, *and* respectability. On the other, dominant images of Horne did not radically challenge the primacy of whiteness in defining hegemonic standards of beauty. By objectifying the light-skinned, European-featured Lena Horne as a race-transcending, world-class beauty, the white liberal media sought to contain Horne’s earlier criticisms of American democracy and use her image to promote a colorblind image of America.

As one of the most internationally recognizable African Americans of the fifties, Horne presented a potential threat as well as a potential weapon in American democracy’s cold war with Soviet communism. As discussed earlier, anticommunists, viewing Horne as a menace, quashed her postwar radicalism by labeling her un-American, pressured her to publicly perform anticommunism, and then deployed her anticommunist performance as a weapon against progressivism. White liberals, on the other hand, sought to contain the popular star’s postwar militancy by representing Horne “just...being Lena Horne,” the glamorous and apolitical singing star – a universal (“American rather than racial”) beauty, whose talent, drive, and loveliness transcended race.²⁶ Following Penny M. Von Eschen’s analysis of the U.S. government’s international promotion of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington as goodwill ambassadors, “symbols of the triumph of American democracy” that obscured the persistence of Jim Crow at home, I suggest that white liberals insisted on “the universal, race-transcending quality” of Lena Horne, while paradoxically relying on her “blackness...to project an image of American

²⁶ “New Beauties Versus Old,” *Ebony*, March 1954, 54.

nationhood that was more inclusive than the reality.”²⁷ The dominant portrayal of Horne suggested American democracy promised equal opportunity regardless of race, belying the continuation of structural inequalities under Jim Crow.

At mid-century, as scholar Carol Dyhouse notes, “The Cinderella story exerted a potent appeal.” Stories of white princesses in love captured the popular imagination, with Walt Disney releasing his animated version of the fairy tale in 1950.²⁸ Pocket Magazine’s Lena Horne “celebrity scrapbook,” titled “The Complete Life of Lena Horne,” fashioned Horne as a modern-day Cinderella, using this popular trope to promote colorblind racism during the 1950s. The pocket-sized scrapbook frames Horne’s biography as a Cinderella narrative, “a real-life story of rags-to-riches,” in which a quintessentially American, even international, beauty reaches “the zenith in movies, radio, television and night clubs” as a result of her individual “strong will” and talent.²⁹ Unlike *In Person*, which framed Horne’s struggle to achieve stardom as largely a struggle against racism and its derivative colorism, this version of Horne’s biography leaves race and racism, apparently irrelevant in cold war America, unmentioned.

The scrapbook elides Horne’s earlier critiques of prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalized racism in order to promote its colorblind vision. According to the scrapbook, Horne eventually left Hollywood because performing in movies proved too “easy,” rather than because of her frustration with MGM’s entrenched racism.³⁰ It frames her marriage to Lennie Hayton as a “real-life romance in Hollywood,” a paradoxical analogy given the Hollywood taboo against representing interracial on-screen romances that had proven a major obstacle to Horne’s

²⁷ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4.

²⁸ Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (New York: Zed Books, 2011), 114.

²⁹ “The Complete Life of Lena Horne,” 6, 26-28, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

acting career.³¹ The scrapbook suggested that the couple delayed their nuptials and their marriage announcement because “they both knew Hollywood and were aware of the pitfalls of the heart that lurk in the movie metropolis.”³² The issues facing the couple because they chose to marry across the color line – discussed by Horne in *In Person* – go unmentioned. Again, the promotion of a colorblind ideal masks the continued discrimination against interracial couples in 1950s America.

Throughout the pictorial scrapbook, Horne’s voice is largely silenced. She is fashioned as “the most beautiful woman in the world today” – a gorgeous, gifted, successful and apolitical Cinderella, who is beloved around the world for “‘embody[ing] all the physical attributes considered most desirable by today’s standards.’”³³ Glamour shots of Horne, highlighting her “stunning looks” and expensive gowns, dominate the text; Horne is an object to be looked at, rather than a person to be heard.³⁴ By quieting Horne, the scrapbook uses her image to confirm the colorblind narrativization of her life. When she is given a voice, it confirms the overall meritocratic narrative of her “complete” life-story: “What advice would I give to young people in show business? I believe that the only way a young singer will get ahead is by study and constant improvement.”³⁵ The pocket scrapbook omits Horne’s racial self-identification as well as her struggles against racism and her earlier critiques of Jim Crow. Instead, the celebration of Horne’s unthreatening femininity and professional success allows white Americans to read Horne’s story as a colorblind class narrative that seemingly confirms the success of capitalist democracy. Simultaneously dependent on Horne’s “blackness,” yet framed as a deracialized class mobility

³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 26-28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

narrative, “The Complete Life of Lena Horne” allowed white Americans to self-identify as racially tolerant as they perpetuated laissez-faire racism.

Overall, the white-controlled mass media extended Horne’s wartime significance as a glamorous and beautiful symbol of white America’s racial tolerance and democracy at work. Once again, MGM depicted Horne as a “highly successful night club singer” performing “Baby Come Out of the Clouds” in *Duchess of Idaho* (1950) and “If You Can Dream” in *Meet Me in Las Vegas* (1956).³⁶ She sang her signature songs – including “Where or When,” “Deed I Do,” “It’s Love,” and “Push De Button” – as a guest on television’s most popular variety television shows.³⁷ As scholar Kristin A. McGee argues, “In many ways, Horne’s television appearances in musical and variety programs like the *Ed Sullivan Show* mirrored her performances in her MGM films. In both mediums, she simply performed ‘specialty’ numbers in musical sequences enhancing the diversity, musicality, glamour, and exoticism of these predominantly white variety programs.”³⁸ Throughout the fifties, television shows like Sullivan’s *Toast of the Town*, *The Perry Como Show*, and *What’s My Line?* promoted postwar assimilationist politics by featuring Lena Horne – as well as other symbolic entertainers of color, who represented both the “familiar” and the “exotic” – for a largely white, middle-class audience.³⁹ Likewise, Horne represented the token black cover girl, with features appearing in *Cabaret*, *Esquire*, *Holiday*, *Look*, *Quick*, and *Top Secret*, among other magazines primarily aimed at a white readership.⁴⁰

³⁶ “Is Lena Still the Queen?” *Ebony*, February 1956, 44.

³⁷ Between 1950 and 1962, Horne appeared as a guest on *Colgate Comedy Hour* (February 25, 1951), *The Frank Sinatra Show* (January 1, 1957), *Music 55* (July 12, 1955), *The Perry Como Show* (October 25, 1958, February 21, 1959, January 20, 1960, January 31, 1962, and October 17, 1962), *The Steven Allen Show* (March 16, 1958), *Toast of the Town* (September 9, 1951, February 14, 1957, and April 28, 1957), *What’s My Line* (September 27, 1953 and March 2, 1958) *Your Show of Shows* (January 20, 1951 and September 19, 1953), and a Timex television special hosted by Sinatra titled *To the Ladies* (February 15, 1960).

³⁸ Kristin A. McGee, *Some Like It Hot: Jazz Women in Film and Television, 1928-1959* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), 240.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 241-242.

⁴⁰ See “Brooklyn’s Outstanding Sons and Daughters,” *Holiday*, June 1950; “Lena Horne: No More Blues in the Night,” *Quick: Pocket News Weekly*, January 8, 1951; “Song for Horne,” *Look*, May 8, 1951; “Are Night Clubs Old-

“You Have to See Her”

Horne’s album covers and song choices also contributed to her image as, in the words of biographer James Gavin, “a showbiz socialite” living in an America free from racial discrimination.⁴¹ Despite many reviewers’ criticisms of Horne’s album-recording capabilities, reinforcing her objectification by arguing ““you have to see her”” to appreciate her song-styling, Horne signed an exclusive recording contract with RCA Victor and released her first album with the label, titled *It’s Love*, in 1955.⁴² The cover for *It’s Love* featured a headshot of Horne by photographer Mitchell Bliss. Smiling in an off-the-shoulder gown and diamond earrings, against a pink background, Horne appears girlish. The album material itself reflected the performer’s “special affinity for the [love] songs of the motion pictures and stage.”⁴³

Horne’s second RCA album, *Lena Horne at the Waldorf Astoria* (1956), presented a live recording of Horne singing her usual sophisticated repertoire as the headliner at the Waldorf Astoria’s fashionable Empire Room, which, as film historian Donald Bogle describes, catered to “the most cosmopolitan night club goers...dressed to the tees in taffeta, chiffon, diamonds, emeralds, ermine, and mink.”⁴⁴ *High Fidelity* applauded Horne’s performance on *At the Waldorf Astoria* for her ““ability to triumph over invisibility,”” noteworthy praise given Horne’s longtime reputation as a mediocre recording artist, ““whose stunning appearance [was] an important ingredient of her success.””⁴⁵ Similarly, John Chapman, Drama Critic of the New York *Daily News*, praised Horne’s recording *Give the Lady What She Wants* (1958), writing, “She doesn’t

Fashioned?” *Quick: Pocket News Weekly*, November 26, 1951; Robert Ruark, “Lady in a High Key,” *Esquire*, September 1952; Arch Ayres, “How Long Can a Glamour Girl Last?” *Cabaret (The Adult Entertainment Magazine)*, March 1957.

⁴¹ James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne* (New York: Atria Books, 2009), 281.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 265-266.

⁴³ Fred Reynolds, liner notes, *It’s Love*, Lena Horne with Lennie Hayton and His Orchestra, LP, RCA Victor LPM-1148, 1955; Fred Reynolds, “Platter Chatter,” review of *It’s Love* by Lena Horne, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 4, 1956, 12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849-1987).

⁴⁴ Donald Bogle, *Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography* (New York: Boulevard Books, 1998), 326.

⁴⁵ *High Fidelity* quoted in Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 265-266.

have to be seen to be appreciated – just heard. Somehow, whatever song she sings makes a picture of what Miss Horne looks like – lovely in person, stylish but never too stylish in dress, dignified without being stuffy, possessed of great natural grace.”⁴⁶ Despite assertions that Horne’s disembodied voice on *At the Waldorf Astoria* “completely puts across the thrilling sensuality, without vulgarity, for which she is famous,” Horne’s body remained central to her success as a recording artist, with highly stylized album covers exploiting Horne’s face and figure to market her records.⁴⁷ For example, *At the Waldorf-Astoria* boasts a cover photograph of Horne, from the waist up, again positioned against a pink backdrop. Depicted in a close-fitting, sleeveless, salmon-colored lace gown accented by a diamond and turquoise broach, Horne’s bejeweled hands frame her smiling, precisely made-up face.

Likewise, *Give the Lady What She Wants* (1958) featured Horne head thrown upwards, flashing her signature smile. She pulls back a red curtain with one hand, as her other arm gracefully highlights the taffeta train of an otherwise figure-hugging scarlet gown. Featuring Horne singing Tin Pan Alley, Hollywood, and Broadway favorites, such as “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend” and “Baubles, Bangles and Beads,” *Give the Lady What She Wants*, much like Horne’s other albums of the period, solidified her symbolic image as a beautiful, carefree and highly successful, black glamour girl.

In spite of growing praise for Horne’s vocal abilities, the reception of *Lena, Lovely and Alive* (1962) perhaps best reflects the continued significance of Horne’s acclaimed beauty and physicality for her critics and fans alike. Nominated for several Grammy Awards, *Lena, Lovely and Alive* lost to Ella Fitzgerald’s *Ella Swings Brightly With Nelson Riddle* in the category for Best Solo Female Vocal Performance, yet won the Grammy for Best Album Cover. As record

⁴⁶ John Chapman, liner notes, *Give the Lady What She Wants*, Lena Horne with Lennie Hayton and His Orchestra, RCA Victor LSP-1879, 1958.

⁴⁷ *High Fidelity* quoted in Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 265-266.

producer Dick Pierce notes, Horne's "extraordinary beauty and performing talent...overshadowed her singing to the point where it is not...given the credit it should be given."⁴⁸ The award-winning cover stands in contrast to the singer's fifties covers, which consistently featured a brightly smiling Horne, and resembles her other covers of the early sixties *Lena at the Sands* (1960) and *Lena on the Blue Side* (1961). All close-ups highlighting the performer's flawless face, these covers depict a cool, sensuous, unsmiling Horne, very unlike the girlish, carefree Horne of *At the Waldorf Astoria*. Consistently, Horne's image outperformed her vocal performances.

Overall, throughout the fifties and early sixties, Horne's albums, film roles, television appearances, and dominant press coverage portrayed the star's life as a token story of glamour, beauty, romance, and success. As Hollywood and the dominant press characterized Horne as a universal beauty whose achievements transcended race, at the same time, it relied on her "blackness" to suggest an increasingly colorblind America where African Americans with drive, determination, and talent could reach the "pinnacle" of success.⁴⁹ This slightly retooled image of Horne the wartime glamour girl reflects an effort to retain her significance as a token of white tolerance and symbol of democratic promise in the face of her earlier criticisms of Jim Crow America. Liberal white America disseminated this image of Horne for audiences at home and abroad, using it as a tool in the war against communism and international condemnations of U.S. racism.

Horne as Good Will Ambassador

In spite of Horne's attempts to perpetuate her self-construction as a civil rights activist by speaking and fundraising on behalf of the NAACP's annual Christmas Seal campaign, popular

⁴⁸ Dick Peirce, liner notes, *Lena...Lovely and Alive*, Lena Horne accompanied by The Marty Paich Orchestra, LP, RCA Victor NL-45988, 1962, reissued and distributed by Fresh Sound Records, Barcelona, Spain, 1972.

⁴⁹ "The Complete Life of Lena Horne," 6.

representations of Horne in the black press continued to suggest that her symbolic role as a beauty ambassador – describing her as “the first proof to the world that a Negro woman could be beautiful” – marked her greatest contribution to the struggle for racial integration.⁵⁰ During World War II, the black press celebrated Horne “as a worthy ambassador of goodwill and better race relations for the Negro.”⁵¹ In a published letter to Santa Claus dated late 1945, Horne wrote, “I am deeply conscious as well as appreciative of the fact that we of the stage and screen are ‘Goodwill Ambassadors’...just as certainly as are other leaders in their respective fields.”⁵² In this letter, Horne self-represents as thankful for the opportunity to act as a symbolic ambassador of racial goodwill and aware of sacrifices that accompany this obligation. By 1950, as discussed in the second chapter, Horne suggests that she struggled with this role of “Ambassador of Good Will,” who had a responsibility “to advance [her] entire race” by performing black beauty and respectability for white spectators onstage and off.⁵³ With *In Person*, she had expressed skepticism at the “Ambassador of Good Will Theory” as a black middle-class strategy for achieving equal rights for African Americans. Viewing it as “one-sided,” Horne asserted, “I couldn’t see how [the Theory] was going to work, nor could I believe that it was worth all the compromises we were forced to make for it.”⁵⁴ Despite her postwar attempts to eschew her status as a wartime symbol for an activist persona, the black middle-class that produced Horne bade her to again represent the “American Ambassador of Song” and “Negro” beauty.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Duckett, “Fabulous Lena Horne Rivals,” *The Chicago Defender*, 7.

⁵¹ Harry McAlpin, “The Lena Horne Most People Don’t Know,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 4, 1944, 14B, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Call and Post (1934-1991); also see Harry McAlpin, “Lena Horne Does Great Job At Press Luncheon,” *New Journal and Guide* (Norfolk), November 4, 1944, B20, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Norfolk Journal and Guide (1921-2003).

⁵² “A Peep At Santa’s Mail Through Alvin Moses (ANP),” *Atlanta Daily World*, December 25, 1945, A7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

⁵³ Horne, Arstein, and Moss, *In Person*, 77-78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 84, 88.

⁵⁵ “The Deeps and La Horne Rock Sweden,” *New Journal and Guide*, August 4, 1956, E6D, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Norfolk Journal and Guide (1921-2003).

Following Horne's blacklisting by anticommunists, the black press hoped to salvage her efficacy and mainstream acceptability as a race, class, and gender representative in the struggle to achieve integration.

Throughout the fifties, the black press, especially the new collection of popular postwar black magazines – *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Our World*, *Hue*, and *Tan* – consistently praised Horne's exceptional attractiveness and fashionability; these magazines often favored her as their cover girl and frequently printed beauty, fashion, and romance stories highlighting Horne. In many ways, *Ebony*'s representations of Lena Horne on its magazine's covers and within its pages shaped and reflected the fledgling periodical's celebratory coverage of African American "firsts" and beautiful black women to promote respectability and consumer-citizenship as the keys to achieving integration.⁵⁶ Ultimately, with its middle-class biases, *Ebony* offers a window into postwar "black bourgeois" strategies for achieving African American advancement and acceptability.

Ebony editor John H. Johnson viewed the monthly publication, not as an organ of civil rights protest, but as a new type of black news source, in the vein of *Life* and *Look* magazines.⁵⁷ *Ebony* regularly featured stories chronicling the accomplishments of black "firsts," individuals touted as the "first" African American to symbolically desegregate a white-controlled institution. As a black woman who achieved many "firsts" throughout her career – the press billed Horne as the "first" black woman to challenge significantly the dominant beauty ideal – she appeared all over the pages of *Ebony*. Throughout the fifties and early sixties, the magazine promoted the adoption of middle-class values and consumer-citizenship as a means of achieving equality by

⁵⁶ Also see Megan E. Williams, "'Meet the Real Lena Horne': Representations of Lena Horne in *Ebony* Magazine, 1945-1949," *Journal of American Studies* 43 no. 1 (2009), 145-158.

⁵⁷ From the first *Ebony* editorial quoted in John H. Johnson and Lerone Bennett Jr., *Succeeding Against the Odds* (New York: Warner Books, 1989), 160.

consistently highlighting Horne's professional success, respectable deportment, interracial marriage, commitment to family, atypical income, European travels, and consumerist lifestyle in numerous feature stories.⁵⁸

Although integrationist civil rights organizations, namely the NAACP, successfully supported Horne as well as other individual or small groups of African Americans in symbolically chipping away at segregation, these represented, in the words of Maxine Leeds Craig, "limited victories" because they left the majority of African Americans' lives unchanged.⁵⁹ Additionally, *Ebony* often framed the social and material successes of these "firsts" – viewed as ambassadors of goodwill between the races – as the result of individual hard work and talent. These types of representations obfuscated the significance of black collective action in facilitating the achievements of "race representatives" like Horne and endorsed the liberal meritocracy myth, which promised equality of economic opportunity under capitalism, yet disregarded deeply entrenched structural inequalities along race, class, and gender lines. By highlighting extraordinary African Americans like Horne as ostensible evidence of American democracy at work, *Ebony* implicitly, if perhaps unintentionally, faulted the majority of African Americans – rather than institutionalized racism – for the disparities between whites and blacks in socioeconomic status and occupational achievement.⁶⁰

As Noliwe M. Rooks argues of *Ebony*, "Race, and by extension racism, was an issue in the magazine only so we can be told of the narrowing difference between the races, or shown how African Americans had absorbed U.S. consumer culture sufficiently to be viewed as

⁵⁸ See, for example, "Lena Horne's New Singing Style," 35-36; "Comeback for Lena Horne," 29-32; "Lena Horne Loses Her Dance Partner," *Ebony*, November 1952, 29-32; "The 10 Best-Dressed Negro Women in America," *Ebony*, May 1953, 32-35; "Do Negro Stars Prefer White Husbands?" *Ebony*, May 1954, 41-46; "Best-Dressed Women of 1954," *Ebony*, May 1954, 51-54; "Fabulous Minks: Furrier sells 12 of first 15 sapphire blue minks to fashion conscious Negro women," March 1956, *Ebony*, 67-73.

⁵⁹ Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen*, 71-72.

⁶⁰ See Bobo and Smith, "From Jim Crow Racism to Laissez-Faire Racism," 185-186, 195, 212-213. Also see, Andersen and Taylor, *Sociology*, 243.

nonthreatening ‘good consumers’ and ideal U.S. citizens.”⁶¹ Besides a brief acknowledgment of the “unpleasantness” Horne and white husband Hayton faced as an interracial couple “in many parts of the country,” the life of *Ebony*’s Lena appears full of romantic love and free of racism.⁶² Unlike *Ebony*’s Horne of 1947, who expressed a militant civil rights agenda, *Ebony*’s Horne of the 1950s and early 1960s is silent on issues of race and racism. Instead, she is portrayed as a carefree socialite – touring France; buying exorbitantly priced Parisian gowns; discussing the potential purchase of a new New York home (her “‘No. 1 project’” in late 1954); and shopping with her husband for an Easter hat.⁶³ These representations of Horne and other black “firsts” mirrored the magazine’s promotion of consumer-citizenship and middle-class respectability as integral to achieving progress, social acceptance, and political advancement.

“The Epitome of Negro Beauty”?

Consistently celebrating the light-skinned, straight-haired, European-featured Lena Horne as “the first proof to the world that a Negro woman could be beautiful,” the postwar black press constructed images of Horne to advance racial pride and arguments for integration.⁶⁴ Overall, *Ebony*, *Our World*, and black newspapers applauded that white “newspaper and magazine writers and radio announcers openly admire[d]” Horne’s beauty; at the same time, they contended, “Miss Horne is [not] the only good looking [black] woman in the U.S.A.,” an argument that dated back to the war era.⁶⁵ Unlike the white-controlled media, which represented

⁶¹ Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies’ Pages: African American Women’s Magazines and the Culture that Made Them* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 134.

⁶² “The Private Life of Lena Horne,” *Ebony*, September 1953, 67; also see Avery Williams, “The Lena Horne Love Story,” *Tan*, December 1954, 23-25, 68-69.

⁶³ See, in particular, “Lena Horne Enjoys Her Longest Vacation,” *Ebony*, December 1954, 64-71; “Lena Horne Picks an Easter Hat,” *Ebony*, April 1962, 108-112.

⁶⁴ Duckett, “Fabulous Lena Horne Rivals,” 7.

⁶⁵ “Ebony Photo-Editorial: White No More,” *Ebony*, July 1952, 80; Lawrence F. LaMar, “Lena Horn [sic] as Carmen: Lena Not the Only One,” *The Kansas City Call*, March 10, 1944, 7; see Megan E. Williams, “‘Lena Not the Only One’: Representations of Lena Horne and Etta Moten in *The Call*, 1941-1945,” *American Studies* 51, no. 1-2 (2009), 5-23.

Horne's beauty as race-transcending ("American rather than racial") as well as exceptional (uncharacteristic of the majority of black women), the black press represented Horne as crowning the list of, explicitly raced, black beauties. The postwar African American press viewed both black and white recognition of the collective beauty of African American women as central to its goals of fostering race pride, achieving black equality, and advancing racial integration.

As Maxine Leeds Craig argues, "a particularly male-dominated black, middle-class worldview" shaped the beauty ideal projected by the postwar black press.⁶⁶ In fact, black journalists had long constructed images of beautiful African American women and placed these at the center of the struggle for civil rights. Together, the black press, as Laila Haidarali suggests, placed the "onus" on black women to perform beauty and, thereby, "prove the race worthy of social integration."⁶⁷ In her essay detailing *Ebony's* "gendered image of the 'Brownskin,'" a "visibly 'black'" African American woman whose skin color was "not too dark-skinned to disrupt dominant aesthetic values," Haidairi contends that the magazine – which both shaped and reflected the values of the black middle class – promoted the "Brownskin" as representing its ideal black beauty, in particular, and its ideal African American woman, in general.⁶⁸

Throughout the 1950s, Haidairi argues, *Ebony* represented the "Brownskin" woman, whose "complexion acted as both a badge of racial pride and a shield from white disparagement of dark skin tones," as beautiful, feminine, respectable, heterosexually appealing, socially mobile, and consumerist.⁶⁹ The idealization of "Brownskins," such as Lena Horne, Haidairi asserts, represented *Ebony's* attempt to challenge stereotypical images of black women as either

⁶⁶ Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen*, 47.

⁶⁷ Laila Haidarali, "Polishing Brown Diamonds: African American Women, Popular Magazines, and the Advent of Modeling in Early Postwar America," *Journal of Women's History* 17 (Spring 2005), 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11, 13.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12, 13, 21, 32.

unattractive, dark-skinned mammies or promiscuous, light-skinned jezebels, “without wholly restructuring the dominant understanding of racial and gender identity” or completely undercutting the pervasiveness of colorism among middle-class African Americans.⁷⁰ At the same time, as Haidairi suggests, the “image reflected the era’s hope for full democratic rights.”⁷¹ Although Haidairi only mentions Horne in passing, I would argue that postwar celebration of “the Brownskin” reflects the black press’s struggle to expand definitions of black beauty – as it intersected with femininity, class mobility, respectability, consumerism, and heterosexual allure – beyond the Horne ideal, to suggest that Horne represented just one of many beautiful “Brownskin” women worthy of black admiration and white acceptance.

In 1950, the pictorial magazine *Our World* contained an article titled “10 Most Beautiful Negro Women.” The piece meant to “glorify” the “beauty of Negro womanhood” in “all [its] varieties” by suggesting that Horne represented just one class of black beauty.⁷² The article opened by acknowledging “Lena Horne is a beautiful type,” who deserved “her share of plaudits.”⁷³ Although *Our World* admired Horne’s “delicately modeled face and lovely dark hair,” featuring her on its inaugural cover and several subsequent ones, the article sought to dislodge the notion of Horne’s incomparable beauty, suggesting, “somewhere in these United States may exist Negro women many times more beautiful than Lena Horne.”⁷⁴ The *Our World* article argued that definitions of black beauty “ha[d] no limitations,” encompassing a range of skin tones, from “copper” to “burnished black,” and facial features, from “chiseled” to “superbly negroid.”⁷⁵ In the piece, *Our World* delineated ten “types of Negro beauty,” of which Horne

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17, 32.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷² “10 Most Beautiful Negro Women,” *Our World*, November 1950, 16.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “10 Most Beautiful,” 15, 16.

represented just one – “the ‘olive tan, sophisticated’ type.”⁷⁶ Still, despite this attempt to expand definitions of black beauty to include an array of African American women, as Craig notes, “light-skinned women were disproportionately represented” in “*Our World*’s beauty typology.”⁷⁷ Although the correlation between light skin, respectability, and prettiness lost some credibility by World War II, the skin color of *Ebony*’s models suggests that the black beauty standard held by the black bourgeoisie continued to equate light skin with attractiveness.⁷⁸ Likewise, this attempt to glorify the diversity of black beauty, ultimately failed to undermine the light-skinned Horne’s symbolic position as the epitome of black beauty, the standard against which people continued to judge the attractiveness of African American women.

In 1954, an *Ebony* feature compared “old” and “new” black glamour girls. Although this piece noted that the “natural beauty” of “Lena Horne has become the criterion by which modern Negro beauties are judged,” it also suggested that Horne represented just one of many black beauties.⁷⁹ *Ebony* praised Adelaide Hall, Florence Mills, and Fredi Washington, all light-skinned actresses, as beauties of the past. The magazine also presented as “new” beauties several of Horne’s contemporaries, including cabaret singer and Hollywood actress Dorothy Dandridge. While the black press unfailingly praised Dandridge’s beauty in its coverage of her career, it consistently compared her looks and talents to those of Horne, with this particular article describing Dandridge as “cast in the same mould [*sic*] as Lena Horne.”⁸⁰ Likewise, Horne topped *Ebony*’s 1955 list of “five most beautiful Negro women.” While *Ebony* offered the “talented” Dorothy Dandridge, Hilda Simms, Joyce Bryant and Eartha Kitt as Horne’s “striking”

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen*, 58-59.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “New Beauties versus Old,” *Ebony*, March 1954, 54.

⁸⁰ “New Beauties versus Old,” 54. Also see, for example, “Hollywood’s New Glamour Queen,” *Ebony*, April 1951, 48-53; “Don’t Be Afraid of Sex Appeal,” *Ebony*, May 1952, 24-31; “Can Dorothy Dandridge Outshine Lena Horne?” *Our World*, June 1952, 28-33; “Dandridge Replaces Horne as Top Negro Cinema Star,” *Ebony*, April 1953, 44-45; “Dorothy Dandridge’s Greatest Triumph,” *Ebony*, July 1955, 37-41.

contemporaries, it also reaffirmed Horne's position as the epitome of black beauty, reporting "after [choosing] Lena Horne and Dorothy Dandridge there was very little agreement" among *Ebony's* editors as to which women should complete the list.⁸¹

The "controversy" concerning the magazine's choices extended beyond the "long, and sometimes violent, argument" between *Ebony's* editors to its readers.⁸² In a letter to the editor, reader Robert L. Richardson of San Francisco, California, congratulated the magazine on producing a "good" story appreciated by his fellow Navy men. Richardson wrote that he and his shipmates concurred that the five women "are by far very beautiful" and approved *Ebony's* "choice one hundred per cent."⁸³ Writing from Kansas City, Missouri, Gwendolyn Ray felt *Ebony* "pulled a boner when [it] placed Eartha Kitt's name on the 'World's Most Beautiful Negro Women,'" but "heartily agree[d] with [its] four other selections."⁸⁴ Similarly, Louis E. Hadley of Dallas, Texas, questioned the magazine's selection of Kitt and Bryant, stating, "We get sick and tired of looking at these two every time we read our magazines."⁸⁵ Chas Hammond, an *Ebony* reader from Brooklyn, New York, also critiqued the list, writing, "I'm a great fan of Eartha Kitt, Joyce Bryant and Lena Horne, but in my opinion they could never be among the top Negro beauties."⁸⁶ Hammond's letter disputed Horne's title as black America's foremost beauty and numerous African Americans shared his view.

As Duke Ellington observed in 1952, many African Americans, including members of the black press, "'object[ed] to the fact that...the [white] race use[d] Lena Horne as a measure for beauty.'"⁸⁷ Black photographer Howard Morehead, like Hammond, exemplified this objection.

⁸¹ "Five Most Beautiful Negro Women," *Ebony*, January 1955, 47.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Robert L. Richardson, Letters to the Editor, "Five Most Beautiful," *Ebony*, May 1955, 10-11.

⁸⁴ Gwendolyn Ray, Letters to the Editor, "Five Most Beautiful," *Ebony*, March 1955, 6.

⁸⁵ Louis E. Hadley, Letters to the Editor, "Five Most Beautiful," *Ebony*, March 1955, 6.

⁸⁶ Chas. Hammond, Letters to the Editor, "Five Most Beautiful," *Ebony*, March 1955, 6.

⁸⁷ Ellington, "The Most Exciting Women," 28, 30.

Described by the Los Angeles *Sentinel*'s editor as "one of the nation's most outstanding pin-up photographers," Howard Morehead reportedly "spent his entire career glorifying the beautiful [sic] Negro girl."⁸⁸ In a *Sentinel* column, Morehead argued that Lena Horne did not represent "the epitome of Negro beauty" and questioned the common practice of "judging Negro beauties" by the Horne "standard."⁸⁹ Ellington, in contrast, felt that "Lena deserved to become a symbol" of black beauty.⁹⁰ Despite its efforts to diversify conceptions of black beauty beyond the Horne standard through its celebration of "Brownskin" women, *Ebony*'s editors obviously agreed with Ellington. From the magazine's inception in 1945 through the early 1960s, articles showcasing Lena Horne appeared steadily within its pages and the star appeared on its cover a record eight times.⁹¹

As historian Carolyn Kitch suggests, a magazine's cover girl "conveyed ideas about women's natures and roles, but they also stood for societal values."⁹² As *Ebony*'s favored cover girl, the magazine's image of Horne represented the periodical's ideas concerning the nature and role of black women in the struggle to achieve integration as well as the values of an emerging postwar black middle class. Despite the magazine's efforts to expand definitions of black beauty to include a variety of African American "types," the light-skinned Lena Horne's "name ha[d] become synonymous with [black] beauty" in large part due to her promotion by *Ebony*.⁹³ Her image remained the ideal against which blacks and whites continued to judge the attractiveness

⁸⁸ Howard Morehead, "Pretty Girls Are A California Product," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 25, 1959, SM8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Ellington, "Most Exciting Women," 28, 30.

⁹¹ Horne appeared on the March 1946, November 1947, October 1949 (with jazz artist Duke Ellington), September 1953 (with husband Lennie Hayton), February 1956, January 1958 (with *Jamaica* co-star Ricardo Montalban), April 1959 (with children Teddy and Gail Jones), and April 1962 covers of *Ebony* magazine.

⁹² Carolyn L. Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 6.

⁹³ "Cover," *Ebony*, February 1956, 13.

of African American women. Through Lena Horne Cosmetics, Horne sought to democratize and de-essentialize beauty by making her trade “secrets” available to all black women for purchase.

“The Democratization of Beauty”

During the early twentieth century, cosmetic product manufactures and beauty specialists targeting white female consumers abandoned the nineteenth-century concept of attractiveness, which had traditionally equated beauty with living a moral life devoted to God and family, to promote the “democratization of beauty.”⁹⁴ This “new consumerist doctrine of beauty” suggested “that beauty was something that could be acquired, not through good works, but through good purchases.”⁹⁵ The democratization of beauty promised that every white woman could achieve an attractive appearance – and therefore love and marriage – through the consumption and correct application of the right beauty products; in fact, it instructed white women to achieve beauty through consumption as their democratic right as well as their societal responsibility as modern white women.⁹⁶

As Marlis Schweitzer argues, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries white-owned beauty firms’ fashioned glamorous stage actresses – who “represented an appealing vision of modern womanhood” for their fans – as trustworthy beauty experts through testimonial advertising.⁹⁷ Asserting “that the actress was no more beautiful than the average woman,” this promotional strategy proved central to the growing democratization of beauty.⁹⁸ It encouraged,

⁹⁴ On the “democratization of beauty,” see Berry, *Screen Style*; Marlis Schweitzer, “‘The Mad Search for Beauty’: Actresses’ Testimonials, the Cosmetics Industry, and the ‘Democratization of Beauty,’” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 4 (July 2005), 255-292; Carol Marjorie Peirce, “*Cosmopolitan: The Democratization of American Beauty Culture*” (PhD Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1985); Dawn H. Currie, *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Feitz, “Democratizing Beauty.” Both Schweitzer and Feitz draw on William Leach’s analysis of the “democratization of desire” in department stores to discuss the “democratization of beauty.” See William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

⁹⁵ Schweitzer, “‘Mad Search for Beauty,’” 280.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 280-281.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 261-262, 265.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 255.

even obligated, white women to emulate their favorite stars by buying and applying the cosmetic products they endorsed.

By the 1920s, maintains Susannah Walker, “Black women’s commercial beauty culture shared in” the new consumerist doctrine of the democratization of beauty, “but in doing so, it exposed and often supported racially limited definitions of ideal feminine beauty.”⁹⁹ Whereas nineteenth-century advertisements aimed at black women “stressed good grooming as a route to racial uplift and respectability,” by this period, black manufacturers, like white, suggested that celebrity emulation through consumption led to beauty, love, marriage, and success.¹⁰⁰ In 1917, the newly established Kashmir Chemical Company, a Chicago-based and black-owned cosmetics firm adopted the advertising strategy of celebrity endorsement to sell its “matchless” products.¹⁰¹

African American Female Performers and Testimonial Advertising

The brainchild of Claude Barnett and his fellow investors, Kashmir – later renamed the Nile Queen Corporation – catered to the growing class of black female consumers in Northern cities like Chicago.¹⁰² As historian Kathy Peiss argues, “Claude Barnett’s promotion of Kashmir played a signal role in changing African-American beauty advertising. [...He mimicked] mass marketers’ appeals to modernity, beauty, and heterosexual romance. ...Barnett’s Nile Queen advertisements opened up a dream world of fur-clad women, automobiles, and other icons of luxury.”¹⁰³ Barnett also adopted the stage actress testimonial, widely used by white-owned companies targeting white women, to advertise Kashmir cosmetics to black women.

Between 1917 and 1918, Kashmir launched an advertising campaign in the *Chicago Defender* featuring “celebrated actress” Anita Bush “heartily recommend[ing] Kashmir

⁹⁹ Walker, *Style & Status*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁰¹ Kashmir Chemical Company Advertisement, “Let Your Mirror Be The Judge,” *The Chicago Defender*, Big Weekend Edition, March 17, 1917, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

¹⁰² Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 109.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 217.

Preparations] to colored women everywhere.”¹⁰⁴ Touted as “America’s foremost Dramatic Actress” by Kashmir, Bush performed with the Bert Williams and George Walker Company as a teenager before forming the Anita Bush Players of Harlem (the predecessor of Bush’s Lafayette Players) in 1915. As discussed in chapter two, the Lafayette Players, described as “the first major professional black nonmusical theater ensemble,” performed dramatic works in protest against black entertainers’ relegation to the minstrel stage; the all-black company trained over three hundred theatrical actors, including Horne’s mother Edna Scottron, before its last performance in early 1932.¹⁰⁵

In this campaign, Bush testified for Kashmir Whitener and Cleanser, skin bleach that promised to remove blemishes – liver spots, pimples, and black heads – and lighten skin three to five shades.¹⁰⁶ As Peiss notes, white-owned cosmetics companies peddled skin whiteners and hair straighteners to African Americans as early as the 1850s, reflecting “the aesthetic dimension of racism – gradations of skin color, textures of hair – [which] shaped work opportunities, marriage chances, and social life, giving advantages to those with lighter complexions and straighter locks.”¹⁰⁷ In contrast, during the nineteenth century, many African American entrepreneurs in the cosmetics business, notably Annie Turnbo Malone, manufacturer of Poro Products, and Sarah Breedlove (also known as Madam (Madame) C. J. Walker), founder of Walker Manufacturing Company, refused to manufacture skin bleaches or market their hair care systems as hair straighteners during the nineteenth century; instead, Malone and Breedlove focused on the ability of their products to foster middle-class respectability and economic

¹⁰⁴ Kashmir Chemical Company Advertisement, “Celebrated Actress Uses Kashmir Preparations,” *The Chicago Defender*, Big Weekend Edition, April 7, 1917, 6.

¹⁰⁵ “Anita Bush,” *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 2nd ed., eds. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Oxford African American Studies Center*, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/opr/t0002/e0746> (accessed September 18, 2011)

¹⁰⁶ Kashmir Chemical Company Ad, “Celebrated Actress Uses Kashmir Preparations”; for more on Kashmir Company’s Nile Queen cosmetics, see Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 109-111, 212, 217.

¹⁰⁷ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 41-42.

opportunity for black women.¹⁰⁸ In addition to using marketing strategies that nurtured race pride, many black beauty industry leaders censured white-owned companies for upholding a white beauty ideal that promoted self-loathing and white imitation among black women.¹⁰⁹ As Susannah Walker observes, “Although this was true to some extent, by the 1920s and 1930s the advertising messages of the most prominent white- and black-owned companies were quite similar.”¹¹⁰ During this period, many white-owned companies selling cosmetics to black women adopted Kashmir’s strategy of using the testimonials of African American actresses and chorus girls from popular all-black stage revues to promote their products, eventually eclipsing black-owned beauty companies’ use of the African American celebrity endorsement.¹¹¹

Black beauties of the stage appeared in testimonial advertisements for beauty preparations designed by white-owned cosmetics firms – including the Hi-Ja Chemical Company, Golden Brown Beauty Preparations, and Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitener. In 1924, the white-owned Hi-Ja Chemical Company of Atlanta, Georgia, launched a testimonial advertising campaign featuring Esther Bigeou.¹¹² A performer in black musical revues between 1917 and 1930, Hi-Ja touted Bigeou as a “Dazzling Vaudeville Star.”¹¹³ As “a famous actress and phonograph artist” with seventeen recordings on OKeh Records, Bigeou offered consumers her “beauty secrets,” which included using Hi-Ja products – Quinine Hair Dressing, Cocanut Quinine Shampoo, Skin Whitener Ointment, and Medicated Beauty Soap – to achieve her “long

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 67-69, 89-90, 205, 215.

¹⁰⁹ Walker, *Style & Status*, 14.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹³ Hi-Ja Chemical Company Advertisement, “Dazzling Vaudeville Star tells Beauty Secrets,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 23, 1924, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002).

straight hair” and “clear, light skin.”¹¹⁴ Two years later, Hi-Ja introduced glowing testimonials from Gladys Robinson, “Stage Star” and “famous leading lady of ‘The Smart Set,’” and S. H. Dudley, “petite star of the Ebony Follies.” Each attributed her “long, soft, and silky” hair to Hi-Ja Quinine Hair Dressing.¹¹⁵

Likewise, the white-owned Golden Brown Beauty Preparations employed black stage stars to endorse their products. Established by white-owned drug company Hessig-Ellis in the early 1920s, Golden Brown Beauty Preparations manipulated the successes of race woman and beauty culturist Madam C. J. Walker for financial gain. As Kathy Peiss notes, “performing not only in drag but in blackface,” they created a “‘dummy’ organization” with thirty-five black employees led by Madam Mamie Hightower, a fictional African American spokeswoman fashioned in Walker’s image.¹¹⁶ Fraudulently representing itself, Golden Brown described Hightower as the “Benefactress of Our Race.”¹¹⁷ Similarly, Hessig-Ellis’s choice to name its dummy organization Golden Brown evoked the popular “High-Brown line” created by African American cosmetics manufacturer Anthony Overton, a well-respected “race man,” in order to duplicitously present Golden Brown as a “race business.”¹¹⁸ Golden Brown built additional credibility among black consumers through the endorsements of the popular stars of *Shuffle*

¹¹⁴ “Esther Bigeou,” *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4th ed., eds. Colin Larkin. *Oxford Music Online*, available from <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/subscriber/article/epm/2217> (accessed September 18, 2011); Hi-Ja Chemical Company Advertisement, “Dazzling Vaudeville Star tells Beauty Secrets.”

¹¹⁵ Hi-Ja Chemical Company Ad, “‘I Owe It All to Hi-Ja,’” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, June 12, 1926, A4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); Hi-Ja Chemical Company Advertisement, “This Charming Actress Says ‘Hi-Ja Grows Soft Silky Hair,’” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, July 17, 1926, A4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); see also Hi-Ja Chemical Company Advertisement, “‘Through An Actress Friend I Found Wonderful Hi-Ja,’” *New Journal and Guide*, August 14, 1926, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Norfolk Journal and Guide (1921-2003).

¹¹⁶ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 12, 117, 215.

¹¹⁷ Golden Brown Chemical Company Advertisement, “Read What These ‘Shuffle Along’ Stars Say About Golden Brown,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 13, 1925, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002); see also Golden Brown Chemical Company Advertisement, “Supremacy of Golden Brown Beauty Preparations,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), November 8, 1924, 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

¹¹⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 108-109.

Along, Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake's all-black cast Broadway musical revue. In a 1924 promotional campaign appearing in the black press, Josephine "Bobby" Holmes, described by Golden Brown as "one of the greatest stars the Race has produced," attributed "her personal attractiveness to Madam Mamie Hightower."¹¹⁹ In this advertisement, Holmes recommends the Golden Brown Beauty Ointment, Hair Dressing, Complexion Soap, Face Powder, Rouge, and Talcum powder to her fellow actresses in "Shuffle Along" and her fans.¹²⁰

A subsequent Golden Brown advertisement featured a large portrait of the fictitious Hightower surrounded by portraits of Holmes and her *Shuffle Along* costars – Violet Holland, Jeanette Slaughter, Edna Young, Viola McCoy, Josephine Leggett, Marjorie Jackson, Mary Goodman, Lina Gray, Emma Jackson, Hattie Brown, Ivie Anderson, and Edna Hicks – who speak of the "Supremacy of Golden Brown Beauty Preparations."¹²¹ Additional advertisements of the period emphasized that the love of Golden Brown extended beyond the *Shuffle Along* cast. They boasted Hightower's products are "Considered Absolutely Necessary by Most Famous Stars of Race!"¹²² Golden Brown listed "other stars of the stage and screen, including Ethel Waters, Hazel Meyers, Rosa Henderson, Edna Hicks, [and] Viola McCoy" as pleased consumers

¹¹⁹ Golden Brown Chemical Company Advertisement, "Meet 'Bobby' Holmes of 'Shuffle Along' Fame," *Afro-American*, May 30, 1924, 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); see also Golden Brown Chemical Company Advertisement, "Your Looks," *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, September 13, 1924, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

¹²⁰ Golden Brown Chemical Company Ad, "Meet 'Bobby' Holmes of 'Shuffle Along' Fame."

¹²¹ Golden Brown Chemical Company Advertisement, "Read What These 'Shuffle Along' Stars Say About Golden Brown," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 13, 1925, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002); see also Golden Brown Chemical Company Advertisement, "Supremacy of Golden Brown Beauty Preparations," *Afro-American*, November 8, 1924, 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

¹²² Golden Brown Chemical Company Advertisement, "Greatest Endorsement Ever Given Any Beauty Product," *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, March 14, 1925, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

of their product line.¹²³ Overall, Golden Brown used famous black stars to argue “BEAUTY means SUCCESS” for the actress, the singer, and the average woman.¹²⁴

Like her theatrical predecessors, Lena Horne also endorsed cosmetics through testimonial advertisements in the 1930s. She appeared in two campaigns during this period, endorsing the cosmetic products of white-owned cosmetics companies Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitening Ointment and, later, Lily del Ria. In 1938, an advertisement in the *Cleveland Call and Post* and the Baltimore *Afro-American*, titled “Fred Palmer Laboratories Celebrate 40th Birthday,” described Dr. Fred Palmer as “one of the greatest benefactors of the RACE.”¹²⁵ Like Golden Brown advertisements, this Fred Palmer Laboratories ad obscured Palmer’s whiteness and exploited the rhetoric of race pride and black community building used to advertise the beauty preparations of black entrepreneurs Walker, Malone, and Overton. In celebration of the fortieth anniversary of Dr. Palmer’s “discovery of his famous Skin Whitener,” the article “hailed” Palmer for “his sense of fairness and generosity” toward those “handicapped by a too dark muddy complexion.”¹²⁶ Although skin pigmentation affected a person’s life chances and opportunities in a racist and colorist culture, the suggestion that a person with dark skin was “handicapped” perpetuated, rather than challenged, colorism. The congratulatory article notes that “today, many stage stars, society women, club leaders, and celebrities...recommend Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitener because it acts faster and works better to lighten and brighten too

¹²³ Golden Brown Chemical Company Ad, “Greatest Endorsement Ever Given Any Beauty Product.”

¹²⁴ Golden Brown Chemical Company Advertisement, “Beauty Means Success,” *Afro-American*, October 24, 1924, 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

¹²⁵ “Dr. Fred Palmers Labs. Celebrate 40th Birthday, Offer Free Samples of Dr. Fred Palmer’s Amazing Skin Whitener Ointment,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 24, 1938, 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Cleveland Call and Post (1934-1991); see also “Fred Palmer Laboratories Celebrate 40th Birthday,” *Afro-American*, February 26, 1938, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

¹²⁶ “Dr. Fred Palmers Labs. Celebrate 40th Birthday, 9; “Fred Palmer Laboratories Celebrate 40th Birthday,” 11.

dark skin tone.”¹²⁷ The story listed Lena Horne “of the New York stage” as one such advocate of Palmer’s whitening ointment.¹²⁸

In 1936, Fred Palmer Laboratories featured Horne in a promotional campaign touting its signature product. The first advertisement, appearing in *The Chicago Defender*, featured a photograph of the disembodied heads of Dr. Fred Palmer and Lena Horne, but leaves the star unidentified. Between the heads, the ad’s text announces, “How Famous Dr. Fred Palmer Lightens One Girl’s Skin.” As an unnamed model, Horne’s naturally light skin signified the efficacy of Dr. Palmer’s ointment without requiring her written testimony or even any further mention of “how” the ointment actually lightened this “one girl’s” skin.¹²⁹ A later advertisement, also in *The Chicago Defender*, featuring the same image of Horne’s floating head, now identified its model as “Miss Lena Horne,” a “New York stage star who is an enthusiastic endorser of Dr. Fred Palmer’s products.” A cartoonish balloon emanated from Horne’s head, reading: “When Skin’s Lighter Life’s Brighter.” The majority of the text links light skin achieved through the ritual application of the whitening ointment with “popularity, romance, and attention,” and dark skin with social ostracism.¹³⁰

Circulating in black newspapers, including, the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the Baltimore *Afro-American*, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, and *The Chicago Defender*, throughout 1936, the most prominent Palmer’s advertisement featuring Horne clearly identified her by name and as “one of

¹²⁷ Bobby Grant, “Broadway Follies Star”; Vivan Brown, “beautiful Chicago Prima Donna”; Margot Webb of the ballroom dance team Norton and Margot; among others endorsed Dr. Fred Palmer’s. See Dr. Fred Palmer Laboratories Advertisement, “Broadway Follies Star Endorses Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitener Preparations,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 17, 1929, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993); “Dr. Fred Palmers Labs. Celebrate 40th Birthday, 9; “Fred Palmer Laboratories Celebrate 40th Birthday,” 11.

¹²⁸ “Dr. Fred Palmers Labs. Celebrate 40th Birthday, 9; “Fred Palmer Laboratories Celebrate 40th Birthday,” 11.

¹²⁹ Dr. Fred Palmer Laboratories Advertisement, “How Famous Dr. Fred Palmer Lightened One Girl’s Skin,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, April 4, 1936, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

¹³⁰ Dr. Fred Palmer Laboratories Advertisement, “When Skin Lighter Life’s Brighter” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, August 8, 1936, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

the most beautiful, talented and famous actresses of today.” It highlighted the “wonderful successes [that] have made her name known in thousands of homes” as well as her “startling beauty.” This ad capitalizes on Horne’s image – again featuring her hovering head – as well as her written testimonial to promote Dr. Fred Palmer’s ointment. Beneath Horne’s disembodied face, a text box announced, “Read What Lena Horne Says.” The star is quoted as saying, “I cannot praise Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitener Ointment enough. I am always particular about my complexion, especially in the summer, because every actress must always look her best. Naturally I depend on Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitener Ointment because of its extra strength action and lovely results. I recommend it to all my friends.’ (Signed) Lena Horne.” Below Horne’s testimony is a chart titled “How Is Your Skin,” which features three illustrated faces captioned dark, medium, and light. The ad tells readers – “When surface skin is ugly, dark, Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitener Ointment lightens and brightens. Medium? It lightens and whitens. Light? Keeps it bright. For all three, Dr. Fred’s is always right!” The advertisement exploits the consumer’s desire to emulate her favorite star as it perpetuates the correlation between beauty and lightness/whiteness. Using Horne’s naturally light skin, her popularity as a rising celebrity, and her testimony, the advertisement welcomes readers to join the singer’s friendship circle as well as to achieve her “lightness,” “brightness,” beauty, and success through the consumption of its brand of skin bleaching cream.¹³¹

A past endorser of Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitening Ointment, Horne also reportedly supported the prospective use of monobenzyl ether of hydroquinone – “a chemical that can

¹³¹ Dr. Fred Palmer Laboratories Advertisement, “Girls! Here is the Fastest Way to Really Lighten Skin!” *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 14, 1936, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001). This same advertisement also appeared in the *Afro-American*, May 16, 1936, 3; *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 16, 1936, 5; *Afro-American*, June 13, 1936, 11; *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, June 13, 1936, 2; and *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, August 1, 1936, 5; also see Shari Roberts, “Seeing Stars: Feminine Spectacle, Female Spectators, and World War II Hollywood Musicals” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, December 1993), 93-94.

change the color of skin from black to white” – by African Americans who wished to “‘pass’ as whites” in 1949.¹³² That August, Walter White published a controversial article, highlighting the scientific discovery of this chemical and its effects on melanin, in *Look* magazine. White’s commentary explored the racial, social, economic, and political implications of the scientific discovery of hydroquinone on the American color line. Analyzing an unpublished draft of White’s article, scholar Eric Porter argues, “[W]hile his original draft suggested that the solution to the race problem lay in the destabilization of racial categories...the *Look* piece gave the impression that the leader of the NAACP was actually promoting the idea of mass skin bleaching.”¹³³ Likewise, the published article quoted Horne endorsing the discovery of hydroquinone as “‘the greatest thing for race relations that has ever happened.’”¹³⁴ According to Porter, Horne is unmentioned in White’s draft and it is unclear if she actually made this statement.¹³⁵

As reported by African American columnist James Hicks, when questioned “whether Lena actually said it,” Horne’s white press agent George Evans replied that “he [had not] talked with Lena since the Walter White article appeared.” In lieu of a statement from Horne, Evans offered his opinion, stating, “‘I don’t think the colored people I know would be willing to go around masquerading themselves by using a chemical. I think they have too much to be proud of and I think they think so too.’”¹³⁶ Performing in Canada at the time, Horne neither corroborated nor contested the validity of the *Look* quote. Although it is uncertain whether *Look* accurately

¹³² Walter White, “Has Science Conquered the Color Line?” *Look*, August 30, 1949, 94.

¹³³ See Eric Porter, “‘Black No More’? Walter White, Hydroquinone, and the ‘Negro Problem,’” *American Studies* 47 (Spring 2006): 15.

¹³⁴ White, “Has Science Conquered,” 95.

¹³⁵ Porter “Black No More,” 16, 29n29.

¹³⁶ James Hicks, “Big Town,” *Afro-American*, September 10, 1949, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988). Also published as James Hicks, “Big Town,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, September 10, 1949, 1B ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Call and Post (1934-1991); James L. Hicks, “Changing Skin Color Still Lively Issue,” *New Journal and Guide*, September 10, 1949, 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Norfolk Journal and Guide (1921-2003).

quoted the “lovely singer-actress,” Horne’s 1936 promotion of Dr. Palmer’s makes a 1949 monobenzyl endorsement conceivable.¹³⁷

In 1937, Horne promoted another cosmetics company. That year, she “specially” posed for Lily del Ria, a newly created cosmetics line, which promised to provide “the Race something that it has wanted and deserved for a long time – an expensive and luxurious line of treatment cosmetics for the more fortunate modern society woman.”¹³⁸ The photograph of Horne, taken by Lily del Ria photographer Noble Bretzman, as she looks down and leftward, with her hands clasped gracefully beneath her jawline, appeared in *The Chicago Defender* and shop windows as well as at beauty demonstrations and product premieres throughout 1937.¹³⁹ A white-owned company based in Indianapolis, Indiana, Lily del Ria promoted twenty-six “exquisite and high grade” beauty preparations, touted as “the first line of its kind ever to be directed to the Race exclusively.”¹⁴⁰ Headed by white Indianapolis businessmen, including company president Wells Hampton and secretary-treasurer Woods A. Caperton Jr., Lily del Ria proudly employed African Americans like Lois Smith, product demonstrator, and Bob Andrews, described by the *Cleveland Call and Post* as “America’s greatest and most highly productive salesman.”¹⁴¹ The cosmetics corporation drew on the rhetoric of black pride, respectability, “service, employment, progress

¹³⁷ White, “Has Science Conquered,” 95.

¹³⁸ “Indianapolis Corp. Opens High-Grade Cosmetic Field,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, February 6, 1937, 12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

¹³⁹ Lily del Ria, Inc. Advertisement, “Design For Beauty by Lily del Ria,” *The Chicago Defender*, February 27, 1937, 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975). Also see “Lily Del Ria Draws Much Praise At YMCA Premiere,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, March 13, 1937, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); “Lily Del Ria Products Display at Premiere,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, March 13, 1937, 2; ProQuest Historical Newspaper The Chicago Defender (1910-1975) “Shauter’s Drug Store Displays Lily Del Ria Products,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 20, 1937, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Call and Post (1934-1991).

¹⁴⁰ “Shauter’s Drug Store Displays Lily Del Ria Products,” 4; “Indianapolis Corp. Opens High-Grade Cosmetic Field,” 12.

¹⁴¹ “Cosmetic Firm Demonstrates Preparations,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, February 20, 1937, 17, ProQuest Historical Newspaper The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); “At Chicago Demonstration of Lily Del Ria Products,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, February 20, 1937, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspaper The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); “Lily Del Ria Products Display at Premiere,” 2; “Master Salesman Is Bob Andrews,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 3, 1937, 12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Call and Post (1934-1991).

and success” to present its products as tools for racial uplift.¹⁴² It respected African Americans as middle-class consumers and courted them accordingly. Mirroring the promotional tactics of Max Factor – makeup artist to Hollywood’s white stars – Lily del Ria offered free product demonstrations to black clubwomen and treated black Chicago to a beauty premiere, which “promise[d] to rival in beauty and prominence of personnel, the famous Hollywood, California, premieres,” and ultimately drew over “500 people of both races” to the debut.¹⁴³

Although a white-owned business like Dr. Fred Palmer’s, Lily del Ria approached black female consumers using both similar and different methods. Comparable to Palmer Laboratories, Lily del Ria linked lightness with beauty, marketing skin-whiteners – “Peroxide Cream” and “Body Bleach Cream” – and idealized “skin of light and delicate translucence” in its Horne advertisement.¹⁴⁴ Still, these products represented just two of the twenty-six products listed in Lily del Ria ads. Unlike Dr. Fred Palmer’s, known primarily for its signature skin whitening ointment, Lily del Ria also offered lipstick, rouge, hand cream, astringent, almond lotion, and deodorant among other cosmetics products for black women’s self-beautification. In particular, the *Call and Post* celebrated Lily del Ria’s “three specially created shades of Foundation Cream: St. Mortiz, Continental, Argentine, and six lovely shades of Face Powder, which [promised to] give the truly smart woman a pleasing make-up and one best suited to her individual complexion.”¹⁴⁵ Still, ads featuring Lily del Ria models emphasized the importance of a light complexion in achieving the black beauty standard, as they reflected the larger racist and colorist society.

¹⁴² “Lily Del Ria Draws Much Praise at YMCA Premiere,” 2.

¹⁴³ “Beauty Beyond Seas Is Topic Of Travelogue,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, February 27, 1937, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); “Attend Premiere,” *The Chicago Defender*, National Edition, March 20, 1937, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

¹⁴⁴ Lily del Ria, Inc. Ad, “Design For Beauty by Lily del Ria.”

¹⁴⁵ “Shauter’s Drug Store Displays Lily Del Ria Products,” 4.

The Lily del Ria advertisement featuring Bretzman's Horne portrait, identified Horne by name, describing her as the "sensational song and dance artiste, [who] starred last season with Noble Sissle's orchestra," without offering readers her words of endorsement.¹⁴⁶ A prior Lily del Ria feature had offered product testimonial from Noble Sissle, the black bandleader who, as noted in chapter two, sought to present white audiences with respectable African American goodwill ambassadors onstage and off. Described as "experience[d] in selecting and presenting to the public beautiful girls," including Horne, Sissle reportedly said "that there is one requirement these girls must fulfill, that they must above all else present a beautiful complexion to the public." He went on to claim "without hesitation that the products of Lily del Ria ha[d] done more to help these girls to present a most attractive complexion and skin than anything with which he ha[d] ever come in contact."¹⁴⁷ Silenced, Horne's image, name, and association with respected "race man" Noble Sissle, spoke for her; they suggested that the singer both used and endorsed Lily del Ria, without allowing her the agency to explicitly voice her support. As Marlis Schweitzer suggests, performers "careers were often circumscribed by male producers, managers, and directors" and testimonial advertisements often highlighted the "continuing power struggle...between female performers and male business executives."¹⁴⁸ Significantly, Horne returned to the celebrity testimonial and launched her own cosmetics line in the late 1950s. Like many white actresses before her, Horne revisited the celebrity endorsement to establish some control over her name, image, and professional life.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Lily del Ria, Inc. Ad, "Design For Beauty by Lily del Ria."

¹⁴⁷ "Indianapolis Corp. Opens High-Grade Cosmetic Field," 12.

¹⁴⁸ Schweitzer, "'Mad Search for Beauty,'" 257.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

As early as 1946, the black press anticipated Lena Horne's entrance in the cosmetics industry.¹⁵⁰ Although black female performers – including Horne – had provided testimonials for beauty preparations marketed by white and black-owned cosmetics manufacturers since the early twentieth century and white female stars had launched product lines in their names, no cosmetics line bore the name of a celebrated African American female entertainer until 1956. Despite the black press's prediction, Ella Fitzgerald preceded Horne's entrance in the cosmetics business, pioneering a small line carrying her name. Interestingly, while the black press privileged Horne's good looks, often treating her talent as secondary (or even nonexistent), it treated Fitzgerald in an opposite fashion. The black press celebrated Fitzgerald primarily as a groundbreaking jazz singer, "The First Lady of Song," and not as a great beauty. Lena Horne biographer James Gavin goes so far as describing Fitzgerald as "dowdy" in comparison to the "striking" Horne.¹⁵¹

Nevertheless, as the first black female performer to launch a small cosmetics enterprise, Fitzgerald capitalized on her fame as an entertainer to introduce Top Note greaseless hair dressing and "honey smooth," non-oily, liquid makeup in 1956.¹⁵² Eventually, she expanded her product line to include Top Note liquid makeup in "7 Lovely Shades."¹⁵³ Between October 1956 and March 1957, consumers could find the modest line of eight Top Note products advertised in the New York *Amsterdam News* and for sale at New York City drug stores, pharmacies, and cosmetics counters. According to *Amsterdam News* reporter Betty Granger, Fitzgerald's Top Note "answered the need of every woman of color with a series of special beautiful tones to match beautiful brown skin – including Honey Bun, Warm Glow, Sugar Hill, Bronze Angel,

¹⁵⁰ Bill Chase, "All Ears," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 2, 1946, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

¹⁵¹ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 305.

¹⁵² Ella Fitzgerald's Top Note Advertisement, "A Woman's Secret Told," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 26, 1957, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

¹⁵³ Ella Fitzgerald's Top Note Advertisement, "Mabel Darling," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 26, 1957, 10, and February 2, 1957, 32, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

Honey Bee, Copper Tan, and Mink Brown.”¹⁵⁴ Despite Granger’s excitement, Fitzgerald discontinued production of Top Note that same year.

“The Lena Horne [Cosmetics] Story”

In April 1958, Lena Horne, “getting more business-minded,” followed in Fitzgerald’s footsteps.¹⁵⁵ Although many feminist scholars assert that “the beauty industry worked only *against* women’s interests,” historian Kathy Peiss argues that the beauty industry “opened opportunities for women ...even as it restricted them elsewhere.”¹⁵⁶ Constrained by her ascribed image as the most beautiful woman in black America – or by some counts, the world – the beauty business offered Horne the opportunity to capitalize on this image as well as to reassert some control over the commodification of her name and appearance.

Embracing a chance to join the beauty trade, she “entered into an exclusive agreement” with Marquard, Inc., a California-based cosmetics corporation.¹⁵⁷ White entrepreneurs Leo Baum, Phyllis D. Griffan, Pete Marquard, Harold L. Strom, and Jewel Strom had formed Marquard “[t]o carry on the business of development, production, manufacture and sale of cosmetics, beauty aid and allied products” in July 1957. Baum and Strom officially changed the corporation name to Lena Horne Cosmetics, Inc. in November 1959 following their contract with Horne.¹⁵⁸ In January 1960, following financial difficulties, Lena Horne Cosmetics entered an arrangement with “a company now known as Lena Horne Beauty Products giving Lena Horne

¹⁵⁴ Betty Granger, “Ella Fitzgerald Conquering Cosmetic Field, Too!” *New York Amsterdam News*, March 2, 1957, 12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

¹⁵⁵ “Izzy Rowe’s Notebook,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 27, 1960, A16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002).

¹⁵⁶ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 5.

¹⁵⁷ See Kenneth Frank, letter to Gloria Swanson, January 30, 1961, Gloria Swanson Papers, RLIN Record #TXRC93-A8, Box 205, Folder 10, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin; Articles of Incorporation Marquard Inc., July 29, 1957, Lena Horne Cosmetics Inc., CA-C0341825, California Secretary of State Business Programs Division, Certifications and Records, Business Entities Section.

¹⁵⁸ Articles of Incorporation Marquard Inc., July 29, 1957; Certificate of Amendment of Articles of Incorporation Marquard Inc., November 13, 1959, Lena Horne Cosmetics Inc., CA-C0341825, California Secretary of State Business Programs Division, Certifications and Records, Business Entities Section.

Beauty Products the exclusive right to manufacture and sell beauty products under [Horne's] name."¹⁵⁹ In spite of the monetary complications that eventually ruined Lena Horne Cosmetics and its successor Lena Horne Beauty Products, Horne had achieved another symbolic "first" for African American female performers. Horne's self-named products represented the first such line backed by national advertising – with publicity in *Ebony* as well as black- and white-controlled newspapers – and distributed across the country – with more than seven branches nationwide in locales like Oakland, California; New York, New York; Atlanta, Georgia; Miami, Florida; and the Washington, DC-Baltimore, Maryland area.¹⁶⁰

Writing, "The 'Horne' of plenty of talent has gone into the cosmetic business with all her beauty know-how, and girl, that's a heap," Izzy Rowe of the *Pittsburgh Courier* celebrated Horne's entrance into the beauty industry and endorsed the singer's newly fashioned persona as beauty expert.¹⁶¹ By assuming this role, Horne "talked back" to her sexist and colorist objectification as the measure of black beauty. She sought to capitalize on this ascribed image for her own financial gain as well as to expand definitions of black beauty by creating cosmetic products meant "'to make all...women...beautiful', regardless of skin pigmentation."¹⁶² She challenged those who called her beauty incomparable or natural by emphasizing the performative aspects of beauty and making them available to all. To adopt the words of Marlis Schweitzer and Kathy Peiss, Horne, as a self-fashioned beauty specialist, "sought to expose the constructed nature of

¹⁵⁹ Frank to Swanson, January 30, 1961.

¹⁶⁰ Display Ad 122, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 1959, 22, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Wall Street Journal (1889-1993); "Lena Horne Cosmetics Firm To Open An Atlanta Branch," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 23, 1960, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); "Izzy Rowe's Notebook," A16.

¹⁶¹ "Izzy Rowe's Notebook," A16.

¹⁶² "Lena Horne Line Available to All," *Afro-American*, September 30, 1961, 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

[her] on- and offstage performances” as well as “the theatrical qualities of cosmetics.”¹⁶³ She attempted to demonstrate that her beauty resulted from “seeming,” rather than “being.”

Just By “Seeming,” Like Lena Horne

The contention that “being” Lena meant “being” pretty, as advanced by the postwar black press suggested, whether intentionally or not, that Horne’s beauty emanated from her very nature – indeed, newspapermen often referred to her as a “natural beauty.” This is a dangerous suggestion. It apparently confirms the unsound racist ideologies that had long grouped people hierarchically based on essentialist notions of gender, race, class, and color. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Kathy Peiss, fashion historian Sarah Berry argues that “consumer culture promotes a self-referential worldview that values ‘seeming’ over ‘being,’ a situation that...has...a corrosive effect on older, naturalized hierarchies.”¹⁶⁴ With Lena Horne Cosmetics, Horne challenged essentialist social rankings by suggesting her beauty resulted from “seeming” – from “making up” – rather than “just being.” Advertisements for Horne’s cosmetics line highlighted the performative aspects of beauty, emphasizing the star’s self-fashioned appearance (a significant element of her larger self-fashioned persona) through the use of cosmetics. The ads invited black women to do the same – to perform “prettiness” – through the purchase and proper application of Horne’s beauty products. By highlighting the performative aspects of beauty in its advertisements, Lena Horne Cosmetics promoted the democratization of black beauty beyond herself.

“Sincerely yours, Lena Horne”

As Marlis Schweitzer argues, the ability of actress testimonials to appeal directly to consumer-fans, by associating products with the celebrities they admired and thought

¹⁶³ Schweitzer, ““Mad Search for Beauty,”” 255; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 55.

¹⁶⁴ Berry, *Screen Style*, xvii.

trustworthy, made a very effective marketing strategy. Drawing on the work of Neil M. Alperstein, Schweitzer highlights the “‘imaginary relationship’ that often developed between popular entertainers and their female fans. Many women felt ‘that they [knew]’ celebrities after reading about their lives in newspapers and magazines, and watching them perform in movies or on television.” This consistent exposure to celebrities fostered a “‘bond of intimacy’” between female fans and “actresses they had never met but who represented an appealing vision of modern womanhood.” Horne drew on these “‘pseudo-social interactions’” with her fans, fashioning herself an intimate and a beauty expert, to advertise her cosmetics line to African American women.¹⁶⁵

Drawing on “a characteristic feature of women’s culture in general and ‘beauty culture’ in particular,” Horne, like many beauty specialists, spoke to her consumer-fans “in a friendly, chatty manner, suggestive of a conversation between friends.”¹⁶⁶ The Lena Horne Beauty Products pricing pamphlet included Lena Horne’s “personal message” to her prospective consumers. Addressed “My friends” and signed “Sincerely yours, Lena Horne,” the singer-actress’s note assured her fans that “I personally use all of my products and genuinely endorse each and every one.”¹⁶⁷ In addition to signing her product pamphlet’s personal message, indicating the credibility of her endorsement, Horne also stressed to *Ebony* readers, “Each [item] bears my signature with its personal assurance of surpassed excellence and style.”¹⁶⁸ The product

¹⁶⁵ Schweitzer, “‘Mad Search for Beauty,’” 265-267, 270-271; also see Neil M. Alperstein, “Imaginary Relationships with Celebrities Appearing in Television Commercials,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* (Winter 1991), 43-59.

¹⁶⁶ Schweitzer, “‘Mad Search for Beauty,’” 267.

¹⁶⁷ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Product Pamphlet, May 1961, Gloria Swanson Papers, RLIN Record #TXRC93-A8, Box 205, Folder 10, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

¹⁶⁸ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Advertisement, “An Appointment with Beauty,” *Ebony*, July 1960, 97. “An Appointment with Beauty” also appeared in *Ebony*, August 1960, 124; *Ebony*, August 1960, 141; and *Ebony*, September 1960, 124.

packaging symbolically reinforced Horne's (supposedly) sincere promise to "bring new beauty" into her consumers' lives by offering her personal cosmetics to the African American public.¹⁶⁹

In addition to stressing that Horne used her own line, advertisements emphasized that these "very special preparations...were developed by Lena Horne herself."¹⁷⁰ By asserting that the beauty products "have been formulated under my supervision," Horne donned the role of beauty expert.¹⁷¹ Purportedly "created and used by Miss Lena Horne" to fashion Lena Horne the beauty icon, the performer's message suggested that all of her fans could purchase the tools needed to achieve, like her, an "excitingly glamorous" look.¹⁷² In many ways, Horne's advertisements resemble those of black beauty product campaigns of the same period. As the civil rights movement mobilized, black-owned companies and Lena Horne Cosmetics minimized explicit appeals to racial pride; instead, they privileged the "familiar themes" used to market cosmetics to white women, "that an attractive appearance was essential for female success, that women naturally wanted to indulge in glamour and that the use of the right beauty products would lead to love and happiness."¹⁷³ Drawing on Horne's image as a successful, glamorous, loved, and happy woman, Lena Horne Cosmetics promised African American women could learn to "apply [their] makeup to bring out [their] hidden beauty" by consuming Horne's products and using her "exclusive beauty secrets," available to all through a "free interesting and revealing booklet," an at-home consultation with a traveling beauty ambassador, or a visit to a free beauty clinic.¹⁷⁴ Horne promised readers, "My beauty secrets are now yours!"¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Product Pamphlet, May 1961.

¹⁷⁰ "Lena Horne Atlanta Branch Celebrates Successful Year," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 19, 1961, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

¹⁷¹ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Product Pamphlet, May 1961.

¹⁷² Display Ad 130, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, C4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

¹⁷³ Walker, *Style & Status*, 86, 97, 100

¹⁷⁴ Display Ad 20, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 5, 1960, A5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 120, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement,

As further evidence of Horne's trustworthiness, Lena Horne Cosmetics offered interested consumers free samples of select products by telephone and mail order.¹⁷⁶ An *Ebony* advertisement read, "As a get-acquainted gift from me, meantime, won't you fill in the coupon on this page and mail it to me for a trial size of Lena Horne Cleansing Cream. You'll be amazed by the new freshness and loveliness of you complexion that only this deep, deep 4-way cleanser can give you."¹⁷⁷ Here Horne uses mail order, "seemingly the most impersonal form of exchange," to suggest "intimate correspondences, sisterly service, and trusted counsel."¹⁷⁸ These free promotions and the friendly rhetoric used to advertise them suggested that fans could trust the "bond of intimacy" they felt with Horne the beauty expert as well as the products she endorsed.

"Beauty Products to Make All the Women in the World More Beautiful..."

The dominant standard of black beauty – exemplified by Horne's "copper" colored skin, "delicately modeled face and lovely dark hair" – excluded many black women.¹⁷⁹ Rather than passively accept her ascribed position as the standard of black beauty, Horne used it to self-construct a persona as a beauty expert, sharing her personal cosmetic aids and beauty secrets with her fans. In this position, Horne sought to diversify the definition of black pulchritude to

Los Angeles Sentinel, May 12, 1960, C4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 48, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 7, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 48, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 7, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 130, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, C4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

¹⁷⁵ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Ad, "An Appointment with Beauty."

¹⁷⁶ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Ad, "An Appointment with Beauty"; Display Ad 50, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 48, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 7, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 130, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, C4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

¹⁷⁷ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Ad, "An Appointment with Beauty."

¹⁷⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 82.

¹⁷⁹ "10 Most Beautiful," 16.

include those black women with darker skin tones and more African features by offering black women a “complete line of beauty aids to enhance every complexion.”¹⁸⁰

As Susannah Walker notes, advertisements of the 1920s and 1930s focused on selling the “respectability” of “making up” to African American women. With regular cosmetics use a normative practice among urban black women by the 1940s and 1950s, postwar brand advertisers emphasized why their products represented the best cosmetics merchandise on the market.¹⁸¹ In the past, many cosmetics manufacturers promoted their brand of innovative makeup as the best designed to complement the range of black women’s skin colors. At the dawn of the twentieth century, African American businessman Anthony Overton created High Brown Face Powder ““to harmonize with the color and skin texture of women of our race.””¹⁸² Overton offered his powder in ““four distinct shades: Natural, Flesh-Pink, White and Brunette.””¹⁸³ Similarly, consenting to ““the demands of the times and the requests of our many agents,”” Madam C.J. Walker introduced face powders and skin care products to supplement her famous hair care line in 1919.¹⁸⁴ Annie Turnbo Malone first offered face powders in 1922; Poro manufactured makeup in ““5 browns, Brunette, Flesh, and White.””¹⁸⁵ Founded the same year, Marguerita Ward Cosmetics Company sold powder in ““White, Flesh, Olive, Peach, Seal, Dark and Light Chocolate.””¹⁸⁶ In 1946, beauty culturist Rose Morgan founded Rose Meta, which also

¹⁸⁰ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Product Pamphlet, May 1961; Display Ad 60, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 2, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

¹⁸¹ Walker, *Style & Status*, 86.

¹⁸² Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 108-109.

¹⁸³ Walker, *Style & Status*, 82.

¹⁸⁴ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 112-113.

¹⁸⁵ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 112-113; Walker, *Style & Status*, 82.

¹⁸⁶ Smith, “Cosmetics,” 374; Walker, *Style & Status*, 82.

offered makeup for a variety of skin tones, including face powder, lipstick, rouge, and creams to black female consumers.¹⁸⁷

Still, many African American women, in the words of nightclub singer Norma Shepherd, struggled to “‘match face powder to Negro complexion tones.’”¹⁸⁸ Often, consumers needed to blend three or more shades of makeup to achieve the right hue; lighter shades of makeup appeared too gray and darker shades appeared too orange.¹⁸⁹ According to Horne, her products – “blended of the finest, purest ingredients, using the latest advances in the fields of chemistry and cosmetology” – promised “‘to make all...women...beautiful’, regardless of skin pigmentation.”¹⁹⁰

In 1961, forty-two items comprised Horne’s line of beauty products – including “complete make-up preparations (such dazzling shades!); a complete treatment line (for lovely hands and complexion); fine hair care products; pampering bath preparations; and glamorous fragrances” – designed to complement all African American women.¹⁹¹ Packaged in glamorous pink and gold bottles, tubes, and compacts, Horne offered consumers five shades of mascara; eye shadow and liquid eyeliner in turquoise, violet, gold, and “silver green”; pearlescent nail polish in six hues, with names such as “Calypso” and “Flamingo Orange”; four colors, like “Passion Glow” and “Sharp Red,” of lacquer nail polish; as well as ten shades of lipstick – including “Red Raspberry,” “Stop Red,” and “Slow Fire.”¹⁹² In addition to these products, which pledged to aid all black women in achieving “that *alluring look*,” Lena Horne Beauty Products presented a liquid foundation and a pressed powder compact in “Desert Tan,” “Natural,” “Jamaica,” or

¹⁸⁷ Smith, “Cosmetics,” 374; Walker, *Style & Status*, 107.

¹⁸⁸ Norma Shepherd quoted in Walker, *Style & Status*, 107.

¹⁸⁹ Walker, *Style & Status*, 107-108.

¹⁹⁰ “Lena Horne Line Available to All,” *Afro-American*, September 30, 1961, 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

¹⁹¹ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Ad, “An Appointment with Beauty.”

¹⁹² Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Product Pamphlet, May 1961.

“Cocoa” and advertised as shade matched to beautify black women of all skin tones.¹⁹³ By manufacturing and advertising makeup that match a variety of skin pigmentations, Horne endorsed the beauty of African American complexions in all their diversity.

Still, Lena Horne Cosmetics like other cosmetics firms, “whether black- or white-owned,” as Susannah Walker highlights, “used terms like ‘natural’ and ‘flesh’ to refer to the lighter shades of powder, apparently recognizing shades of powders marketed to white women as the standard.”¹⁹⁴ At the same time, Horne – past endorser of Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitening Ointment and monobenzyl – offered skin lightening cream among her nine skin care products.¹⁹⁵ By selling her own brand of skin lightening cream, Horne perpetuated the equation of light skin with beauty and reflected the continued popularity of skin lightening creams among African American consumers. As Walker notes of this period, “Intensified efforts to produce and promote makeup that suited darker complexions did not alter the media-promoted beauty ideal of light- to medium-brown skin for African American women. Advertisements for skin bleaching creams continued to run alongside those touting brown shades of facial powders and deep-toned lipsticks.”¹⁹⁶ Despite Horne’s choice to include a skin lightening cream in her line, Lena Horne Cosmetics stressed Horne’s desire “to enhance and glorify the natural beauty of Negro women” of every “skin pigmentation” by offering consumers “individualized beauty service” from Horne’s traveling representatives.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Display Ad 60, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 2, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Product Pamphlet, May 1961.

¹⁹⁴ Walker, *Style & Status*, 82.

¹⁹⁵ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Product Pamphlet, May 1961.

¹⁹⁶ Walker, *Style & Status*, 108-109.

¹⁹⁷ “Lena Horne Cosmetics Firm To Open An Atlanta Branch,” 7; “Lena Horne Line Available to All,” 10; Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Ad, “An Appointment with Beauty.”

“You Have an Appointment with Beauty!”

Advertisements promoting “Lena Horne ‘*Personally Yours*’ *Prestige Cosmetics*” emphasized the importance of each consumer’s relationship with her “friendly, trained *Lena Horne Beauty Consultant*.”¹⁹⁸ Describing her beauty representative, Horne promised customers, “She will tell you, for me, about all the exciting Lena Horne aids to beauty” as well as “demonstrate and recommend exactly the proper cosmetics required to make each woman more beautiful.”¹⁹⁹ This direct-sales marketing strategy, with personalized beauty advice at its center, emulated those of several earlier African American beauty experts, including Madam C. J. Walker, Annie Malone Turnbo, and Edward Brandford.

As Kathy Peiss notes, by the 1890s many black female entrepreneurs, including Walker and Turnbo, adopted the cosmetics sales strategy of house-to-house canvassing pioneered by Avon, previously named the California Perfume Company. As African American women excluded from a male-dominated and white-controlled trade, black beauty culturists successfully “parlayed salon- and home-based enterprises into mail-order and door-to-door peddling operations.”²⁰⁰ These marketing strategies appropriated the everyday customs of visiting and conversation, practices central to women’s social life.²⁰¹ Relationships between door-to-door agents and neighbors, like those of beauticians and clients, “mingled the intimate and the commercial.”²⁰² Ultimately, as Peiss suggests, these women remade old and established new distribution, sales, and advertising practices “that would later become commonplace in the

¹⁹⁸ Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, “Coming Soon, Lena Horne’s Own Beauty Secrets,” *Ebony*, December 1959, 144.

¹⁹⁹ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Ad, “An Appointment with Beauty”; “Lena Horne Atlanta Branch Celebrates Successful Year,” 2.

²⁰⁰ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 72.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 133.

business world.”²⁰³ Lena Horne adopted these business strategies to market her cosmetics line by employing traveling beauty consultants who would visit clients in their homes. Advertisements invited potential consumers to “look upon [your consultant] as your friend and beauty confidante.”²⁰⁴ In addition to constructing Lena Horne representatives as trusted intimates, she fashioned them as beauty ambassadors, bringing all black women a cosmetics line that complemented all skin tones *and* individualized advice on its proper selection and application.

At the end of World War II, cosmetics manufactures had long marketed their products to black women, but advice on how African American women should best use these cosmetics remained scarce. Laila Haidarali’s discussion of Brandford Modeling, the first black modeling agency, illuminates postwar black beauty specialists’ desire to correct this oversight. As Haidarali explains, when Edward Brandford founded his agency in 1946, his stylists, like Mary Louise Yabro, “defined one of the agency’s roles as ameliorating the paucity of ‘proper fashion and beauty guidance,’ and noted that the unique ‘problems in makeup and clothes’ facing African American women were too long overlooked.”²⁰⁵ Yabro and other Brandford stylists taught African American women to better use the proper cosmetics and clothing for their skin and body type, hoping to both foster black women’s social and economic success as well as expedite racial integration.²⁰⁶ Similarly, postwar magazines, like *Ebony* and *Our World*, offered makeup advice for their black female readership. As Susannah Walker illustrates, a 1949 *Our World* article described black women’s complexions as their “‘treasure’” and offered makeup advice meant to “‘enrich [their] beauty’” whether their skin tone ranged from “‘mahogany

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁰⁴ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Ad, “An Appointment with Beauty.”

²⁰⁵ Haidarali, “Polishing Brown Diamonds,” 16.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

brown' to 'bronze' and 'olive tan.'"²⁰⁷ Lena Horne Cosmetics capitalized on African American women's need for this personalized beauty advice.

An advertisement featuring a photograph of Lena Horne for Lena Horne Cosmetics declared: "You have an appointment with beauty! My own carefully trained representative will come right to your home to save you all the trouble and convenience of shopping for your beauty needs. And she can graciously give you as much time and individualized beauty service as you wish."²⁰⁸ Horne emphasized the specialized education provided to each of her beauty specialists, representing them as "thoroughly trained in the art of makeup," capable substitutes for *the* beauty ambassador herself.²⁰⁹ A representative of the Atlanta branch of Lena Horne Beauty Products described Horne's traveling experts as qualified to recommend the "correct shades, and proper creams, lotions, and astringents for each type of skin."²¹⁰ Celebrating a successful first year of business, this representative told the *Atlanta Daily World*, "We like to think of it as a service that our Lena Horne Beauty Products salespeople perform. Certainly any woman who will take the time to listen and understand what these fabulous cosmetics can do to enhance her beauty will be a much happier, lovelier person. We are convinced that the Lena Horne Consultants can help ALL women to achieve a more glamorous look."²¹¹ In addition to door-to-door canvassing, Lena Horne Cosmetics offered beauty clinics and public product demonstrations, which promised, "you will become a more beautiful and excitingly glamorous woman" after attending.²¹²

By the late 1950s, beauty schools for African American women represented a central facet of the black cosmetics industry. At the turn of the century, Malone established the first

²⁰⁷ Walker, *Style & Status*, 107-109.

²⁰⁸ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Ad, "An Appointment with Beauty."

²⁰⁹ Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., Product Pamphlet, May 1961.

²¹⁰ "Lena Horne Atlanta Branch Celebrates Successful Year," 2.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Display Ad 130, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, C4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

beauty college for African American women and, in 1920, black female entrepreneur Sarah (Sara) Spencer Washington opened beauty schools across the country and abroad to promote her Apex Beauty System; Walker followed suit.²¹³ As Laila Haidarali notes, many African American women enrolled in beauty school and “its older cousin” the charm school, in the late 1940s and 1950s. These schools pledged to teach young black women “‘important social graces and professional skills,’” including the “‘use of make-up, diction, figure control, hair styling, [and] correct posture.’” Through the proper acquisition of these skills, beauty and charm schools promised to foster black women’s social and economic mobility as well as advance the larger cause of integration.²¹⁴ Lena Horne Cosmetics similarly promoted a free beauty clinic “for girls and women ‘16 to 60’” in hopes of achieving these ends.²¹⁵ An advertisement promised a potential attendee the attention of Horne’s “professional beauty advisor,” who “will help you solve your skin and hair problems and teach you to apply you make-up to bring out your hidden beauty.”²¹⁶ Lena Horne Cosmetics also offered product demonstrations, a staple of beauty culture, for large groups.²¹⁷ Horne’s professional demonstrators, like her door-to-door agents, “mingled the intimate and the commercial” in order to “acclimate women to systematic cosmetic use.”²¹⁸ By offering African American women a line of cosmetics meant to enhance every skin complexion as well as access to the personalized service of door-to-door agents, beauty clinicians, and product demonstrators, Horne sought to empower all black women to act, regardless of skin color, the role of beauty ambassador, advancing racial integration by making up and performing consumer-citizenship.

²¹³ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 75; Blackwelder, *Styling Jim Crow*, 160n16. Also see Blackwelder’s *Styling Jim Crow* for more on the history of African American beauty schools during segregation.

²¹⁴ Haidarali, “Polishing Brown Diamonds,” 28.

²¹⁵ Display Ad 130, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, C4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ “Lena Horne Atlanta Branch Celebrates Successful Year,” 2.

²¹⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 133, 127.

Attention Ladies! Be a Lena Horne Beauty Consultant

Horne complemented her aspiration to democratize black beauty with her desire to engender economic opportunities for other black women. Horne adopted the business strategies developed by Madam C. J. Walker and Annie Turnbo Malone. Walker, Malone, and other black entrepreneurs deliberately created jobs that promised personal and economic autonomy for African American women, who, during the early twentieth century, primarily labored as domestic workers under the surveillance of white employers.²¹⁹ Although the number of black women in domestic work and clerical work declined and grew, respectively, between 1940 and 1960, finding stable and “dignified” work that promised “a small measure independence” remained a challenge for African American women.²²⁰ With Lena Horne Cosmetics, Horne offered black women (and men) economic opportunities as “beauty consultants,” managers, and distributors.²²¹ To publicize these positions, Lena Horne Cosmetics diverged from other postwar ads, which promised readers love and happiness through cosmetics consumption, by emulating ads of the past, which emphasized the financial independence these jobs offered.²²²

An advertisement for Lena Horne Cosmetics proclaimed: “Attention Ladies! 18 years of age and older earn \$75.00 a week and up to \$150.00 selling...American’s most popular brand [of cosmetics].”²²³ Newspaper announcements promised potential employees, without prior selling experience, free training and “top salaries.”²²⁴ With full and part-time employment opportunities

²¹⁹ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 5; White and White, *Stylin’*, 187.

²²⁰ Haidarali, “Polishing Brown Diamonds,” 11; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 91; Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen*, 34.

²²¹ Display Ad 60, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 2, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 50, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Classified Ad 18, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 7, 1960, D2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

²²² Walker, *Style & Status*, 100.

²²³ Display Ad 12, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Atlanta Daily World*, May 1, 1960, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

²²⁴ Display Ad 29, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 19, 1960, A7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 12, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement,

available, Lena Horne Cosmetics offered women, who worked in or outside the home, flexible hours and supplemental incomes – up to “\$40-\$70 per week in your spare time.”²²⁵ In its search for “respectable” beauty ambassadors, Lena Horne Cosmetics welcomed “Neat, attrac.” women to apply for positions as “sales ladies” and appealed to husbands and fathers for would-be “professional beauty advisors” in their wives and daughters.²²⁶

A *Los Angeles Sentinel* advertisement seeking potential traveling representatives declared:

YOU can enjoy more leisure time and many of the other finer things which life offers you – swimming at a poolside, golf, trips abroad, money to spend for clothes and fashions. These are just a few of the many, many things which **can** be yours **now**, this summer as one of our glamorous cosmetic consultants, engaged in the distribution of the brand new – wonderfully exciting Lena Horne Cosmetics.²²⁷

This particular ad appeals to prospective beauty consultants by evoking the glamour and middle-class, consumptive lifestyle that defined Horne’s image as the beauty ambassador at mid-century; it suggests that all black women can achieve a measure of Horne’s beauty and economic security by selling the star’s cosmetics line.

Atlanta Daily World, May 1, 1960, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); Display Ad 60, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 2, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 50, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Classified Ad 18, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 7, 1960, D2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

²²⁵ Classified Ad 3, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 1960, B14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles (1881-1987); Display Ad 29, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 19, 1960, A7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 50, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, B5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Classified Ad 18, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 7, 1960, D2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

²²⁶ Classified Ad 3, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1960, B19, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881-1987); Display Ad 16, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Atlanta Daily World*, March 13, 1960, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); Display Ad 130, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 16, 1960, C4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

²²⁷ Display Ad 7, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 26, 1960, A3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

In addition to beauty consultant jobs, Lena Horne Cosmetics offered positions as managers and distributors.²²⁸ An advertisement seeking city managers called for “experienced personnel, male or female,” with prior “house-to-house experience selling cosmetics” for city managers and promised an “excellent starting salary with liberal commission.”²²⁹ Lena Horne Cosmetics also presented “valuable distributorship” opportunities in “choice areas,” including Washington-Baltimore and New York City, with a profit potential of \$150,000; in distributors, the cosmetics firm sought “progressively minded people” of “excellent character and integrity” to “organize, merchandise, train and supervise field personnel.”²³⁰ Ultimately, Horne sought to use her symbolic role as the most beautiful black woman to create “direct, practical rewards – the means to earn a living” – for other African American women.²³¹

“All Merchandise Priced to Go”

Despite the initial promise of Lena Horne Cosmetics, Horne’s business venture ultimately declared bankruptcy within four years of her contract with Marquard, Inc., plagued by financial and legal difficulties.²³² It is likely that Lena Horne Cosmetics faced some of the same problems confronting black-owned businesses like Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company, Apex, and Murray’s Superior Products in the years between World War II and the early 1960s. After

²²⁸ “Lena Horne Cosmetics Firm To Open An Atlanta Branch,” 7.

²²⁹ Display Ad 2, Lena Horne Beauty Products Advertisement, *Afro-American*, June 11, 1960, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); Display Ad 139, Lena Horne Beauty Products Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 23, 1960, C4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005).

²³⁰ Display Ad 7, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 26, 1960, A3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); Display Ad 83, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, December 5, 1959, B25, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994); Display Ad 206, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, December 6, 1959, C13, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994); Display Ad 43, Lena Horne Beauty Products Advertisement, *New York Times*, April 20, 1961, 45, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2007); Display Ad 42, Lena Horne Beauty Products Advertisement, *New York Times*, April 21, 1961, 46, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2007).

²³¹ Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics*, 6.

²³² See “Lena Horne Products Firm Goes Bankrupt,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 30, 1963, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspaper Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002); “Lena’s Beauty Firm Bankrupt,” *Afro-American*, April 6, 1963, 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

World War II, the growth of an emerging black middle class coupled with the advent of *Ebony* and its successors as advertising vehicles, stimulated white-owned businesses' interest in capturing the African American market.²³³ As a result, product campaigns for goods manufactured by numerous white-owned cosmetics companies appeared in *Ebony*.²³⁴ No longer attempting to pass as black-owned enterprises, these white-owned cosmetics companies – uninterested in creating economic opportunities for black women – relied on advertisements in black-owned magazines, rather than door-to-door sales, to promote brand recognition and stimulate retail sales.²³⁵

Although Lena Horne Beauty Products and black-owned cosmetics manufacturers, such as Walker, Apex, and Murray's, advertised in *Ebony*, few had the resources to advertise on the same scale as much larger white-owned companies.²³⁶ A sampling of the cosmetics advertisements in three *Ebony* issues containing advertisements for Lena Horne Cosmetics – December 1959, July 1960, and August 1960 – illustrate this fact. In addition to an advertisement announcing the forthcoming release of Lena Horne Cosmetics, the December 1960 edition of *Ebony* featured four advertisements for black-owned companies' cosmetics – including Raveen, Johnson Product's Ultra Sheen, and Nu-Nile Pressing Compound, for hair, as well as Overton's Pressed Face Powder and Liquid Makeup – versus ten advertisements for white-owned cosmetics companies, which primarily promoted skin bleaching creams and hair straightening products. Whereas the majority of white-owned businesses bought half- or full-page ad space in *Ebony*, Lena Horne Cosmetics and black-owned manufacturers ran smaller ads, each taking up a quarter of the page.

²³³ Walker, *Style & Status*, 85.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 86, 98.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 96, 99.

While *Ebony*'s July 1960 issue featured full-page ads for Lena Horne Cosmetics and Apex, a two-page Raveen spread, as well as smaller ads for Madam Walker and Nu-Nile, publicity for white brands dominated the magazine's ad space. White-owned businesses like Dixie Peach, Royal Crown, Hair Strate, Posner's, Perma-Strate, Lustrasilk, and Persulan advertised their hair care products, which promised straight hair that "can't revert."²³⁷ Skin bleaching cream ads for Mercolized Wax, Bleach and Glow, Artra, Nadolina, Black and White, and Dr. Frank Palmer's Skin Whitener assured consumers "lighter, brighter" skin.²³⁸ The same holds for the August 1960 issue of *Ebony*, which featured two of the same Lena Horne Cosmetics advertisement; ads for white-owned brands outnumbered those for black-owned brands more than four to one.

As a result of this new attention from white advertisers, black women increasingly chose to purchase cosmetics from modern grocery stores and pharmacies, instead of from door-to-door beauty consultants, who they viewed as old-fashioned.²³⁹ Smaller businesses, many black-owned, which relied on a business strategy supplementing door-to-door canvassing and positive word-of-mouth with small-scale advertising, could not compete with more established, white-owned cosmetics firms.²⁴⁰ As Susannah Walker suggests, "The success of post-World War II marketing campaigns designed to promote black consumers to white advertisers may therefore have initiated the decline of African American beauty product manufacturers, many of which would have serious financial difficulties by the 1970s."²⁴¹ Although an interracial owned company, Lena Horne Beauty Products seemingly encountered challenges similar to those facing black-owned cosmetic businesses.

²³⁷ Hair Strate Permanent Advertisement, "Swim! Shower! Shampoo! Hair Can't Revert!" *Ebony*, July 1960, 127.

²³⁸ Black and White Bleaching Cream Advertisement, "Be More Glamorous, Have Lighter, Brighter Skin," *Ebony*, July 1960, 106.

²³⁹ Walker, *Style & Status*, 85, 98.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 97, 99.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

White actress Gloria Swanson's collected papers also shed some light on the uncertainty surrounding the financial collapse of Lena Horne Cosmetics. Swanson, a Hollywood actress of the silent era, later famous for her Oscar-nominated role as a washed-up silent film star in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), augmented her acting career by investing in companies dealing in cosmetics, fashion, hosiery, and perfume.²⁴² In January 1961, Swanson received a letter from Kenneth Frank, of National Development Company Investments, outlining the "Lena Horne story." Frank's letter reveals that Lena Horne Beauty Products "[was] broke and on the verge of bankruptcy" due to the unsuccessful management of George Trad, deemed "a complete failure," and his replacement Burton Poise. With 2,400,000 shares of publicly traded Lena Horne Beauty Products stock, Frank expressed concern. "Should this company go broke," he wrote, "it will have serious repercussions on Lena Horne's name." Frank, "in order to protect [Horne's] good name," appealed to Swanson for help to "try and work out a reasonable re-organization [of the company] and if this were not possible...to continue to market the same cosmetics under her name in a business like *[sic]* fashion."²⁴³ Following Frank's letter, Swanson attempted to garner interest from more established, white-owned cosmetics manufacturers in acquiring Lena Horne Beauty Products.

In May 1961, Leonard J. Solomon, executive vice president of Lena Horne Beauty Products, sent Swanson a pamphlet containing the "new Lena Horne Cosmetics price lists."²⁴⁴ In January 1962, George Trad brought Robert D. Hodes and Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., to

²⁴² "Gloria Swanson: An Inventory of Her Papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center," Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, available from <http://research.hrc.utexas.edu:8080/hrcxtf/view?docId=ead/00154.xml> (accessed November 9, 2011).

²⁴³ Frank to Swanson, January 30, 1961.

²⁴⁴ Leonard J. Solomon, letter to Gloria Swanson, May 10, 1961, Gloria Swanson Papers, RLIN Record #TXRC93-A8, Box 205, Folder 10, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

the Superior Court of New Jersey concerning his company stocks.²⁴⁵ The following March, the *Washington Post* reported that the Securities and Exchange Commission charged Guardian Investment Corporation and its president Earl J. Lombard “of fraud and untrue statements in the sale of common stock of Lena Horne Beauty Products, Inc., and Wyoming Nuclear Corp.”²⁴⁶ Then, in May 1962, Swanson forwarded the Lena Horne Beauty Products pamphlet to George Abrams, the president of Maradel Products, Inc., an “amalgamation of several small firms in [the] cosmetic field” formed in December 1961.²⁴⁷ Abrams enclosed the product pamphlet in a letter to Hamilton Posner, the white owner of the Harlem-based I. Posner Inc., which marketed hair products to African American consumers.²⁴⁸

In response to Abrams’s letter, dated June 7, 1962, Posner wrote, “I have investigated [Lena Horne Beauty Products] further and decided that it has no further interest for me. If I should decide to put out a cosmetic line for the Negro Trade, the Posner name, I believe, would be more acceptable and has more prestige. Furthermore, the Lena Horne Company would require more money to revive it and carries the name of a personality who is gradually fading.”²⁴⁹ With Posner hair products already endorsed by such African American celebrities as “Sugar” Ray Robinson and Dorothy Donegan, Hamilton Posner felt that the public personality of the “gradually fading” Horne could not sustain a cosmetics label and turned down the opportunity to

²⁴⁵ “Trad v. Hodes, 178 A. 2nd 247 – NJ: Superior Court, Law Div. 1962,” available from http://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=10796771676231139267&q=Trad+v+Hodes&hl=en&as_sdt=2,9 (accessed September 20, 2011).

²⁴⁶ “Enjoined Broker to Get Hearing,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, March 10, 1962, D10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994).

²⁴⁷ “Martin Revson Rides Again,” undated, Gloria Swanson Papers, RLIN Record #TXRC93-A8, Box 205, Folder 10, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

²⁴⁸ George J. Abrams, letter to Hamilton Posner, May 23, 1962, Gloria Swanson Papers, RLIN Record #TXRC93-A8, Box 205, Folder 10, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

²⁴⁹ Hamilton Posner, letter to George J. Abrams, June 1, 1962, Gloria Swanson Papers, RLIN Record #TXRC93-A8, Box 205, Folder 10, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

“revive” Lena Horne Cosmetics.²⁵⁰ Instead, Posner believed that a potential makeup line with “the Posner name,” recommended by several celebrities, would prove more profitable. Posner’s released a line of makeup for black complexions, named Custom Blends, in 1969.²⁵¹

Posner’s concern, that Horne represented a “gradually fading” personality, might also explain the ultimate failure of Lena Horne Cosmetics. In her discussion of celebrity testimonial advertising, scholar Marlis Schweitzer suggests, “[C]onsumers’ relationships with celebrities are dynamic and therefore difficult to predict and control.”²⁵² Advertisers who relied on one celebrity endorser risked having a “star’s extra-theatrical persona” outshine their product.²⁵³ By constructing marketing campaigns around numerous celebrities, businesses “avoided making a direct link with a single performer, thereby distancing themselves from any negative associations that consumers may have had with a specific [celebrity], while protecting their brand identity and securing their consumer base.”²⁵⁴ While Posner’s assessment of Horne’s career is problematic, Horne’s light skin, straight hair, and European features may have overridden her desire to appeal to African American women with a range of skin tones, hair textures, and facial features. Paradoxically, as Lena Horne advocated the democratization of black beauty through her line of cosmetic products, she risked reinforcing her ascribed position as the epitome of black beauty, in effect advocating black women achieve beauty by performing “Lena Horne-ness” through the consumption and application of her brand of cosmetics. As the face of Lena Horne Cosmetics, Horne’s image, her proximity to ideal white beauty, may have eclipsed her message of democratizing black beauty standards, reinforcing colorism. As one self-confident “dark-skinned

²⁵⁰ “‘Sugar’ Robinson Endorses Posner Hair Products,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 23, 1956, A10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005); “Dorothy Donegan Endorses Ebonaire,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 19, 1957, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001).

²⁵¹ Walker, *Style & Status*, 175.

²⁵² Schweitzer, “‘Mad Search for Beauty,’” 271.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 273.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

gal” declared proudly in a 1946 issue of *Ebony*, “I am no Lena Horne.”²⁵⁵ Perhaps entrenched associations between Horne and “lightness” caused “darker-skinned gals” to eschew Lena Horne Cosmetics in favor of other brands. Shortly after Posner’s letter to Abrams, Lena Horne Cosmetics ceased production, with the *Atlanta Daily World* advertising “going out of business” sales in July 1962.²⁵⁶

Conclusion

Although Lena Horne Cosmetics ultimately failed as a business venture, the cosmetics company represents the singer’s appropriation of her prescribed role as a beautiful goodwill ambassador – an “advertis[ement] to the world that [black] people can be beautiful, inside and out” – and her attempt to use it to empower herself and other black women to resist narrow definitions of black beauty and achieve economic independence. At the same time, Horne’s attempt to fashion a new persona as beauty expert highlighted the performative aspects of beauty. With Lena Horne Cosmetics, Horne promoted the democratization of black beauty ambassadorship, suggesting that every black female consumer had the capacity and responsibility to beautify herself through the purchase of Lena Horne’s brand of cosmetics. Additionally, Horne’s traveling sales representatives acted as an army of beauty ambassadors, bringing Lena Horne’s beauty secrets – weapons in the fight for civil rights – to everyday black women. Lena Horne Cosmetics suggested that by making up and performing middle-class beauty, respectability, entrepreneurship, and consumer-citizenship like Lena Horne, African American women could facilitate social mobility, personal autonomy, and racial integration. In effect, Horne sought to create an army of beautiful goodwill ambassadors whose physical

²⁵⁵ Letter from Madam Ebony Beaute, *Ebony*, November 1946, 4.

²⁵⁶ Display Ad 7, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Atlanta Daily World*, July 8, 1962, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); Display Ad 12, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Atlanta Daily World*, July 15, 1962, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003); Display Ad 11, Lena Horne Cosmetics Advertisement, *Atlanta Daily World*, July 22, 1962, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

attractiveness, respectable comportment, economic independence, and avid consumerism would challenge racism and make a bid for first-class citizenship.

CHAPTER 5
“HERE’S LENA NOW!”
Performing the “Real” Lena in *Lena*

In January 1960, Horne discussed her relationship to the burgeoning civil rights movement with Art Buchwald of the *New York Herald Tribune*. The article quoted Horne as saying, “‘Some of the hip intellectuals are mad at me because I’m not on the speaking-for-my-people kick. But I discovered long ago that what I was screaming about were things I wanted for myself and my family. So I can’t get into public arguments as to how I’ve been mistreated, mainly because I’ve been treated pretty good.’”¹ Lena Horne – whose musical persona rested on performing glamour for primarily white patrons at posh, urban night spots – continued, “I...can’t get up in a night club in a \$1,000 dress and start singing “Let My People Go.””² Since slavery, African Americans have intoned “Go Down, Moses,” with its famous chorus of “Let My People Go,” to express collective suffering under racism, resistance against oppression, faith in God, and hopes for freedom.³ During the late 1950s and early 1960s, civil rights organizations practicing nonviolent direct action, including the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), supplanted the NAACP, and its legalistic strategies for achieving integration, as the leaders of “radical” black protest.⁴ By 1960, direct action integrationism had

¹ Art Buchwald, “Lena Horne Isn’t the Memoir Type,” *New York Herald Tribune*, January 10, 1960, page unknown.

² Buchwald, “Lena Horne Isn’t the Memoir Type,” page unknown.

³ “The Spirituals: ‘Go Down, Moses’ and ‘Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel,’” in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal*, edited by Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 111.

⁴ Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 16, 17.

clearly emerged as “a singing movement.”⁵ The freedom songs sung by activists during peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience represented a cultural reclamation of traditional African American protest music, a repertoire comprised of slave songs, spirituals, gospel music, and union songs.⁶

Horne suggested that wearing an extravagant gown, an important aspect of her signature performance of glamour, while singing “Go Down, Moses,” a traditional spiritual of black protest, at swanky establishments like The Grove and The Waldorf “‘would hardly look proper.’”⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, Horne, constrained by red-baiters and enjoined by leaders of black organizations, appropriated her wartime image as the first black glamour girl, whose “job...was to sing” and act as an ambassador of racial goodwill.⁸ By contrasting her singing style and repertoire with that of protesters singing freedom songs, Horne implied that her performances were apolitical. As scholar Richard Iton contends, black artists often “claim not to be ‘political’ to avoid the unwanted scrutiny of the state and other associated authorities in the realm of formal politics.”⁹ Subjected to years of surveillance and public censure as a communist sympathizer for her radical postwar politics, Horne self-represented as a proper, glamorous, lavishly gowned nightclub singer during the 1950s. “Her job, she suggested, was to sing” her

⁵ Vincent Harding, Robin D. G. Kelley, and Earl Lewis, “We Changed the World, 1945-1970,” in *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans*, eds. Robin D. G. Kelley, and Earl Lewis, 445-542 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 489.

⁶ Kerran L. Sanger, “*When the Spirit Says Sing!*”: *The Role of Freedom Songs in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Garland, 1995), 21.

⁷ “Miss Lena Horne (An Editorial),” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), February 27, 1960, 18, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988). Horne’s choice of words – her concern with propriety – highlights the musical biases of her middle-class origins. Following emancipation, many African Americans, especially those who viewed respectability politics as the route to equality, had distanced themselves from this traditional music and singing style, regarding it as an embarrassing reminder of slavery. See Sanger, “*When the Spirit Says Sing!*”, 25.

⁸ “Miss Lena Horne (An Editorial),” 18.

⁹ Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8.

customary repertoire of popular love songs.¹⁰ By emphasizing the “apolitical” character of her repertoire and performance style, Horne attempted to further distance herself and, significantly, her career, from any potential accusations of persistent communist connections.

Yet, by the mid-1950s, as Ingrid Monson illuminates, civil rights activists, African American journalists, and many fans expected professional black musicians to adopt a strong pro-movement stance.¹¹ Those African American artists – including Nat King Cole and Duke Ellington – who continued to perform for segregated audiences faced censure for their indifference toward the moral standards of the burgeoning civil rights movement.¹² When asked about civil rights politics by the *New York Times* in 1960, Louis Armstrong answered, “I don’t know anything about it; I’m just a trumpet player.”¹³ In these years of intensifying collective black protest, African American communities denounced those formerly “beloved” black musicians – like Armstrong – who avoided taking a public stand on behalf of movement politics by suggesting they were “just entertainers.”¹⁴ In this context, the Buchwald interview suggested Horne was largely uninterested in the civil rights movement. The Baltimore *Afro-American* picked up the story – featuring the headline “‘Can’t sing ‘Let My People Go’ in \$1,000 dress’ – Lena” in its January 23, 1960 edition.¹⁵

A comparison between the *New York Herald Tribune*’s version of the Horne-Buchwald interview, published on January 10, 1960, and the version reprinted in the February 7, 1960 issue

¹⁰ “Miss Lena Horne (An Editorial),” 18.

¹¹ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, kindle ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), loc. 82-84, 813-15.

¹² *Ibid.*, loc. 855-56.

¹³ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 71.

¹⁴ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, loc. 837-38.

¹⁵ “Star Gazing: ‘Can’t sing ‘Let My People Go’ in \$1,000 dress’ – Lena,” *Afro-American*, January 23, 1960, 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

of *The Washington Post*, reveals the *Herald Tribune*'s distortion of Horne's civil rights politics.

The Post quotes Horne as stating:

"Some of the [hip] intellectuals are mad at me because I'm not on the speaking-for-my-people kick. But I discovered long ago that what I was screaming about were things I wanted for myself and my family. So instead of standing out on street corners shouting for Negroes, I channeled my resources as a spokesman, to an organization I respect like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and bow my head to Martin Luther King who's doing the job quietly and effectively down South where it really hurts. I can't get into public arguments as to how I've been mistreated mainly because I've been treated pretty good."¹⁶

In this account of the Buchwald interview, Horne's political commitment to the civil rights movement – as a NAACP spokesperson and supporter of Martin Luther King's protest tactics – is clear. Moreover, within this context, Horne's statement – "I can't get into public arguments as to how I've been mistreated mainly because I've been treated pretty good" – suggests she understands that her experiences with racism differ significantly from those experienced by the majority of African Americans, especially those living in the South, rather than an apathetic attitude toward the movement. The *Herald Tribune*'s misrepresentation and its potential consequences given movement expectations that black entertainers publicly support the struggle for civil rights, must have frustrated, and even infuriated, Horne.

Despite this disparity, both versions of the interview highlight the singer's increasing dissatisfaction with performing the role of "Negro first":

"Of course, as a Negro I've had a lot of firsts. But that isn't much fun either because you have to be a model and real nice and, if you'll excuse the expression, a credit to your race, and it gets to be a bore. It's like when Jackie Robinson became the first Negro ball player, he had to do everything right. He couldn't spit on nobody because he was a first. But Ted Williams could spit on anybody he wanted to."¹⁷

¹⁶ Art Buchwald, "Lena's Life Too Dull to Make Real Best-Seller," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, February 7, 1960, H5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1995).

¹⁷ Buchwald, "Lena Horne Isn't the Memoir Type," page unknown; Buchwald, "Lena's Life Too Dull to Make Real Best-Seller," H5.

As the above passage suggests, by 1960, Horne was growing tired of the burden of performing “the black lady,” a race, gender, and class performance that required she act like a role model, a credit to her race, and a symbol of racial goodwill under all circumstances. For years, Horne had performed black, middle-class, female respectability, cultivating an image that promoted the black elite’s uplift ideology – an identity performance that required Horne to repress her anger toward whites and, instead, to behave “real nice” toward them.¹⁸ As Horne suggests, Boston Red Sox leftfielder Ted Williams, a white baseball player infamous for spitting and swearing at spectators, might behave tastelessly without his behavior reflecting poorly on the white race as a whole.¹⁹ In contrast, as the first black player, Jackie Robinson “had to do everything right” despite the racial slurs, spit, flying cleats, balls, hate letters, and death threats hurled at him.²⁰ In the face of racism, “Negro firsts” were primed to act “real nice.” Black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier highlighted this pattern of middle-class conduct in *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957). “Middle-class Negroes,” Frazier argued, “do not express their resentment against discrimination and insults in violent outbreaks, as lower-class Negroes often do. They constantly repress their hostility toward whites. [...] It is unlikely that a middle-class Negro...will ever ‘break loose.’”²¹ Known to act the “lady at all times,” no one expected a violent outbreak from Horne.²² Yet just

¹⁸ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 6.

¹⁹ In a 1956 game against the New York Yankees, Fenway spectators booed Ted Williams for “misplaying Mickey Mantle’s windblown fly in the 11th.” In response to the jeering, Williams spat at the crowd, his third spitting episode in three weeks. Ultimately, the Red Sox fined Williams \$5,000 for his lewd behavior. “A Tribute to Ted Williams: Ted Williams Timeline,” The Official Site of Major League Baseball, available from http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/news/tributes/mlb_obit_ted_williams.jsp?content=timeline, accessed March 22, 2012.

²⁰ Larry Schwartz, “Jackie Changed Face of Sports,” ESPN, <http://espn.go.com/sportscentury/features/00016431.html>. (accessed March 27, 2012).

²¹ E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957; reprint, New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 225-226.

²² Daphne Sheppard, “King’s Diary,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 27, 1960, 19, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

weeks following Horne's interview with Buchwald, the singer "broke loose" with her "famous – or infamous – unscheduled performance in the Luau in Beverly Hills."²³

On February 15, 1960, during a brief respite from a two-week run at the Cocoanut Grove, Horne, husband Lennie Hayton, and friend Kay Thompson agreed to meet at the Luau, a "faux-Polynesian" restaurant in Beverly Hills around midnight for drinks.²⁴ The staff seated Horne and Hayton at a corner table on the restaurant's upper level and they waited for Thompson to join them.²⁵ When she did not arrive, Hayton went to telephone Thompson, leaving Horne alone at their table to overhear a drunken conversation between two white patrons – Harvey St. Vincent, vice president of an engineering firm, and his companion Norman Wynne. Noticing Horne, Wynne pointed her out to St. Vincent, who, apparently unable to see the celebrated singer in the dim light of the restaurant, loudly insulted her, reportedly saying, "'Well, she's just another black nigger.'"²⁶ Breaking character, Horne hurled a hurricane lamp, glasses, and ashtrays at St. Vincent; an ashtray made contact, cutting the engineer above his left eye.

A flurry of newspaper coverage followed as reporters and fans attempted to reconcile this "unscheduled performance" with the image of Horne as the consummate black lady and ambassadress of racial goodwill – "one of the loveliest, most respected women in the Negro race."²⁷ With Horne initially unavailable for comment, the *Daily Defender* questioned the singer's manager Ralph Harris; describing Horne as "the most wonderful woman I've ever known," Harris said, "'this woman has never done anything like that.'"²⁸ Accounts attempted to reconcile the apparent contradiction between Horne's violent act and her reserved persona. The

²³ Lena Horne and Richard Schickel, *Lena* (1965; reprint, New York: Limelight Editions, 1986), 272.

²⁴ James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne* (New York: Atria Books, 2009), 295.

²⁵ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 272.

²⁶ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 296.

²⁷ "The Right to Be Wrong (An Editorial)," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 20, 1960, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

²⁸ "Lena Horne Hurls Objects in Offense to Man's Slurs," *Daily Defender* (Chicago), Daily Edition, February 17, 1960, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

New York Amsterdam News and *Atlanta Daily World* reported that Horne “rose and courteously requested that this white man refrain from insulting her through racial epithet,” saying ““I can hear what you are saying. Please stop.””²⁹ White journalist Herb Lyon of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* described Horne as “heartsick about losing her temper,” perhaps in a bid to preserve Horne’s image as white America’s symbol of racial tolerance for a primarily white readership.³⁰ Other reports suggested that Horne’s unapologetic behavior was consistent with her image – “a lady at all times but spunky and courageous whenever the need arises.”³¹ In fact, an *Amsterdam News* editorial, asserted,

Lena Horne would not be Lena Horne today in the eyes of millions of black and white Americans if she had...allowed Lena Horne’s name to be degraded.... And so, Lena Horne, because she was Lena Horne, struck back in the way that any outraged human would have done. There is a psychological zero in any war of nerves and Lena Horne, who has been a lady all these years despite the insults heaped upon her, arrived at that point Tuesday night, and at that point, by her own admission, she “lost control” and banged this bigot over his head.³²

Inconceivable a decade prior when the threat of blacklisting severely limited Horne’s political expression, Horne’s militant Luau “performance” in 1960 and the black press’s refusal to condemn publically her violence represent the expanded definition of acceptable political protest fostered by the civil rights resistance of the late 1950s.³³ As Horne told reporters in 1960, and later reiterated in her 1965 autobiography *Lena*, she received countless telegrams and letters from African Americans, surprised by, but supportive of her actions.³⁴

²⁹ “The Right to Be Wrong (An Editorial),” 1; “Lena Lets Loose With Everything Following Insult,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February, 17, 1960, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

³⁰ Herb Lyon, “Tower Ticker,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1960, A2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849-1987).

³¹ Sheppard, “King’s Diary,” 19.

³² “The Right to Be Wrong (An Editorial),” 10.

³³ Penny M. Von Eschen makes the same argument regarding Louis Armstrong’s public denunciation of the Eisenhower administration for its refusal to enforce the desegregation of Little Rock, Arkansas, schools in 1957. See Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 63, 71.

³⁴ “‘Just Pushed Me Too Far,’ Says Lena: Tells AFRO of Plans to File Suit,” *Afro-American*, February 27, 1960, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); *Lena*, 273.

In *Lena*, Horne refers to her “unscheduled performance” as a great release of “some of the anger” that she “had bottled up...for so long.”³⁵ Unlike the newspaper accounts that insisted Horne politely asked St. Vincent to stop insulting her before reaching her breaking point – a representation that attempted to protect her image as a symbol of black, middle-class feminine decorum – *Lena*’s textual Horne reacts immediately to St. Vincent’s slur, shouting “‘Here I am, you bastard, I’m the nigger you couldn’t see,’” as she hurled table items at his head. Of the stunned approval she received from African Americans for her actions, Horne writes in *Lena*,

I was surprised at that. I always thought they knew that I would respond this way to provocation of this kind. But apparently they had not really known that. ...The mail made me feel that they wanted to identify with me, as I wanted to identify with them. I realized, as I read their letters, that this was something I had wanted more than I had ever admitted to myself, and that I had always been afraid that they would not believe me if I did something militant or just plain angry. ...In fact, they were genuinely pleased, I think, to see a famous symbol reacting as an outraged Negro person.³⁶

The cultivation and performance of the persona fashioned above – Horne as misunderstood, militant black woman whose symbolic position as an ambassador of racial goodwill separated her from the black masses by constraining and overshadowing her “outrage” at racial inequality – would fuel the singer’s autobiographical projects of early 1960s and culminate with her second autobiography, co-written with white author and film critic Richard Schickel.

LENA TRADES “NIGHT CLUB ‘MOVEMENTS’ FOR THE FREEDOM KIND”

Horne took the first step toward creating this new persona when she stepped down from the night club stage in 1963. With her six-week engagement at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York coming to an end, Horne announced her retirement from nightclubs, citing the “‘the courage and sheer power of those young students in the South’” as inspiring her decision.³⁷ No longer content

³⁵ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 272.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 273-274.

³⁷ Art Sears Jr., “Lena Quits Night Clubs to Launch New Career,” *Jet*, March 14, 1963, 60-61.

to perform the singing goodwill ambassador, she repeatedly critiqued her standard repertoire of love songs as trivial, asserting: “‘It’s stifling to keep singing these silly boy-girl songs all your life. All the drama has moved from Broadway to Mississippi.’”³⁸ Over the course of the following year, Horne committed herself to the civil rights movement.

Soon after announcing her retirement, on May 24, 1963, Horne joined James Baldwin as one of “a group of deep thinkers,” assembled by the author at Attorney General Robert Kennedy’s request, to discuss “the new anger of the masses and the inability of Negro leaders to dampen it.”³⁹ Those also present at the meeting included Edwin Berry, director of the Chicago Urban League; twenty-three-year-old CORE activist Jerome Smith; June Shagaloff, a white NAACP representative; renowned social psychologist Dr. Kenneth Clark; playwright Lorraine Hansberry; singer-actor Harry Belafonte; white film actor Rip Torn; and Burke Marshall, Assistant Attorney General in charge of the United States Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division.

Following the Kennedy meeting, on June 7, 1963, Horne – accompanied by her son Teddy Jones; her friend, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority president, Dr. Jeanne Noble; and her longtime companion and musical collaborator Billy Strayhorn – joined Mississippi NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers and black comedian Dick Gregory in Jackson for a weekend of demonstrations following the mass arrest of forty-seven civil rights protestors.⁴⁰ That night, Horne spoke to a group of over 1,500 activists at a NAACP mass meeting.⁴¹ The next day,

³⁸ Ben Burns, “Lena Horne To Quit Singing In Niteries,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Daily Edition, February 14, 1963, 13, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender (1910-1975); “Lena tired of nightclub dates,” *Afro-American*, February 23, 1963, 12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

³⁹ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 809-810.

⁴⁰ “Lena joins Dick Gregory in Miss. ‘rights’ fight,” *Afro-American*, June 22, 1963, 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); also see Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 314-317.

⁴¹ “Lena joins Dick Gregory in Miss. ‘rights’ fight,” 9; Horne quoted in “Freedom Fighters Sexually Abused: Sex abuses in Jackson jail told,” *Afro-American*, June 15, 1963, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-

Horne performed at a church concert sponsored by the SCLC.⁴² Accompanied by Strayhorn, Horne forewent her conventional repertoire to sing a medley of freedom songs, including “This Little Light of Mine,” “I Got a Home in that Rock,” and “I’m Beginning to See the Light.” The audience joined Horne as she sang her final selection, “We Shall Overcome,” the movement anthem.⁴³

Upon returning to New York, Horne was scheduled to appear on the June 12, 1963 episode of NBC’s *Today* show with host Hugh Downs. As she waited backstage, Horne learned of the assassination of Medgar Evers in Jackson the night before; she joined Downs and current NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins in an on-air discussion of the civil rights movement and the Mississippi NAACP field secretary’s brutal murder. Describing Horne’s *Today* show appearance, Poppy Cannon White, widow of Walter White, wrote, “Tragic, obviously weary and strained, she spoke broken-heartedly – full of grief and sorrow, about her last meeting with a dear friend, Medgar Evers.”⁴⁴ When Downs questioned Horne’s “‘apparently sudden interest’” in the movement, she pointed to her years of NAACP service as evidence of her prior commitment to civil rights.⁴⁵ That afternoon, Horne met Martin Luther King Jr. for the first time at a meeting held in his honor by the Gandhi Society for Human Rights. On August 20, 1963, at King’s request, Horne performed as the first headliner of the SCLC’s “Stars for Freedom” benefit concert series in Atlanta, Georgia.

Eight days later, on Wednesday, August 28, 1963, Horne joined demonstrators in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. According to sociologist Herbert H. Haines, the

American (1893-1988); Horne quoted in “Lena Horne, Dick Gregory Participate In Miss. Rally,” *Atlanta Daily World*, June 12, 1963, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003).

⁴² Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 317.

⁴³ “Lena Horne, Dick Gregory Participate,” 1.

⁴⁴ Poppy Cannon White, “Poppy’s Notes: Beautiful Lena,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 29, 1963, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993).

⁴⁵ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 319.

March on Washington, a protest demanding passage of civil rights legislation (later adopted as the Civil Rights Act of 1964), represented “the symbolic climax” of “the era of nonviolent protest.”⁴⁶ That morning, protestors gathered at the Washington Monument on the National Mall. From the platform bordering Constitution Avenue, Ossie Davis introduced Horne, who, in an apparent attempt to eschew her glamorous image, wore tortoise-shell glasses, “a simple tan cotton skirt and blouse, dark tan boots, and her hair covered with a bright yellow chiffon scarf with a blue and yellow NAACP cap.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Rosemarie Tyler of the Baltimore *Afro-American* perpetuated Horne’s fashionable image in her coverage of the March, writing, “Miss Lena Horne was the most underdressed of the stars and the most beautiful! [...H]er yell of ‘Freedom!’ brought cheers from early arrivals that totaled about 100,000 at 11 a.m. Hours later, and her face still free of the ‘shine’ that came with the sun, and heat for most of the women, and lipstick perfect, Lena was enthusiastically greeted by all the stars!”⁴⁸ For Tyler, Horne’s reputation as a beautiful fashion plate worked to overshadow her simple, impassioned cry for freedom, despite the singer-activist’s efforts to deemphasize her celebrated looks. Following Horne’s platform appearance, the protestors marched en masse toward the Lincoln Memorial, where a speaker’s platform stood under Lincoln’s statue. As Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his celebrated “I Have a Dream” speech, described by Haines as “an impressive symbol of the civil

⁴⁶ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 39.

⁴⁷ Robert E. Baker, “200,000 Jam Mall in Mammoth Rally In Solemn, Orderly Plea for Equality,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, August 29, 1963, A1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1994); Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 326; Rosemarie Tyler, “Dick Gregory says March is beautiful,” *Afro-American*, September 7, 1963, 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

⁴⁸ Rosemarie Tyler, “Dick Gregory says March is beautiful,” *Afro-American*, September 7, 1963, 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

rights movement as a whole,” Horne stood behind him among “the cultural contingent of the march.”⁴⁹

After the March on Washington, Horne continued to support the movement. On October 5, 1963, Horne joined Frank Sinatra in a Carnegie Hall concert to benefit the Gandhi Society for Human Rights and SNCC. For the performance, Horne worked with songwriters Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg to prepare a new movement-inspired repertoire, which included “Silent Spring” and a variation of the Arlen-Gershwin song “It’s a New World” prompted by the March on Washington.⁵⁰ Songsmiths Jule Styne, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green contributed a hard-hitting adaptation of the Hebrew song “Hava Nagila” titled “Now!” Horne would adopt the Styne-Comden-Green tune, with its punchy lyrics – “The message of this song’s not subtle / No discussion, no rebuttal / We want more than just a promise / Say goodbye to Uncle Thomas” – and its call for “action now” as her movement anthem. Following the success of her benefit performance, Horne recorded “Now!” as a single with a portion of album sales donated to CORE and the NAACP.⁵¹ Upon its release, radio stations across the country banned the single; many found the following lyrics potentially offensive: “Everyone should love his brother / People all should love each other / Just don’t take it literal, mister / No one wants to grab your sister.”⁵² Several station spokesmen argued that the song’s “strong integration theme” proved too controversial.⁵³ In response to the ban, Roy Wilkins disseminated a “special memorandum” to

⁴⁹ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 39; Sue Cronk, “Stars Plan Performers’ Boycott,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1963, 3, 13, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881-1987); Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 326.

⁵⁰ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 331.

⁵¹ “Ban ‘Now’ Song By Lena Horne,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 7, 1963, A2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel: 1934-2005.

⁵² “Ban ‘Now’ Song By Lena Horne,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 7, 1963, A2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Sentinel: 1934-2005; “Lena’s tune on wax after CBS veto on radio,” *Afro-American*, November 9, 1963, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); “Banning Lena’s ‘Now’ record made it hit,” *Afro-American*, November 16, 1963, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

⁵³ “Banning Lena’s ‘Now’ record made it hit,” 6.

NAACP branches in “key listening area[s]” encouraging them to form “letter-and-telephone committees” to “melt the broadcast freeze on ‘NOW!’”⁵⁴ Encouraged by the reaction to “Now!,” Horne recorded an album titled *Here’s Lena Now!* Released in 1964, *Here’s Lena Now!* featured the banned single along with “Silent Spring,” “Blowin’ in the Wind,” and several other movement-inspired songs.⁵⁵

Prelude to *Lena*

This recent surge in activism raised questions for some regarding Horne’s sincerity and commitment to the cause, which by 1963 seemed overdue. “Participation of ‘show folk’ in things racial has become more marked these days,” noted Holloway in the April 20, 1963 edition of the *New Journal and Guide*, causing people to ask, “‘Are “show people” for real when they move bodily into racial affairs as they have been doing lately?’”⁵⁶ Although Holloway deemed Horne “real” in her commitment, citing her years of NAACP service, this question of authenticity – “Are Stars ‘Real’ In Protesting Race Ills?” – continued to haunt Horne and fueled her 1963 autobiographical project titled “I Just Want to Be Myself” and printed in *Show*, “The Magazine of the Arts.”⁵⁷

Published as the cover story of *Show*’s September 1963 issue, “I Just Want to Be Myself” is an article written in support of “the Negro revolt” based on Horne’s life-story.⁵⁸ “In *Show*,” as

⁵⁴ Roy Wilkins, “Special Memorandum from the Executive Secretary,” November 27, 1963, Box III: A153, Folder 8, The Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁵⁵ Stirred by the song’s political message, Cuban filmmaker Santiago Álvarez featured Horne’s recording as the soundtrack to a documentary short of the same title in 1965. The Baltimore *Afro-American* acknowledged Álvarez’s efforts to “flay” American racism with his five-minute film depicting “scene after scene of bayonet-wielding National Guardsmen, the use of police dogs and tear gas, and demonstrators in chains and being carried off to jail in police wagons.” See “Racial disturbance flayed by Cuban ‘documentary,’” *Afro-American*, February 12, 1966, 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

⁵⁶ Holloway, “Are Stars ‘Real’ In Protesting Race Ills?” *New Journal and Guide*, April 20, 1963, B23, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Norfolk Journal and Guide (1921-2003).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Lena Horne, “I Just Want To Be Myself,” *Show*, September 1963, 62.

biographer Gavin writes, “she strove to give herself a new persona.”⁵⁹ Through “I Just Want to Be Myself,” Horne talks back to those who “assume [she is] somehow removed from all the problems Negroes have to face” because she is “relatively successful.”⁶⁰ Although Horne acknowledges that her privilege does, “in many respects,” shield her from prejudice, she ultimately self-represents as “an exploited Negro woman,” used by nightclub owners, Hollywood, cabaret audiences, and politicians, who appropriated her “image” for their own purposes.⁶¹ She tells readers, “It was not easy to be a ‘pioneer’ in Hollywood” with MGM limiting her to cameo roles easily excised for Southern release and NAACP executive secretary Walter White “writing letters saying ‘remember your position’ (in other words, don’t disgrace us).”⁶² This brief allusion to White foreshadows Horne’s characterization of the NAACP leader in *Lena*.

In “I Just Want to Be Myself,” Horne also re-writes her political past, suggesting white politicians “used” her as a spokeswoman for the causes that prompted her *Red Channels* listing; Carlton Moss and Pettis Perry are unmentioned.⁶³ Likewise, she retracted her earlier renunciation of Robeson to realign herself with his radical politics, stating, “Paul was called a Communist for thinking and saying some of the things that are now accepted as a legitimate part of the Negro protest. ...I really believe that if it weren’t for the insanity that struck America after World War II, Paul would be one of our greatest leaders.”⁶⁴ She names Robeson and her paternal grandmother as the two influential figures responsible for her early politicization and ultimately her inability “to ignore the larger Negro struggle.”⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Gavin, *Stormy Weather*, 326.

⁶⁰ Horne, “I Just Want To Be Myself,” 113.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 113, 63.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

Of the present movement for black freedom, she asserts, “I want to be a part of it in whatever role I can fill best. I have only one condition in terms of my joining the fight – I intend always to speak for myself. I am not a “spokesman” for the Negro people, nor am I a spokesman for any particular organizational branch of the fight.”⁶⁶ In many ways, this article heralds Horne’s later rejection of her symbolic role and her bid for racial authenticity through *Lena*, her most significant autobiographical performance of the civil rights era.

PERFORMING “AUTHENTIC” BLACKNESS

As scholar E. Patrick Johnson argues, “Often, it is during times of crisis (social, cultural, or political) when the authenticity of older versions of blackness is called into question.”⁶⁷ During this period, a new generation of black activists challenged the efficacy of the black elite’s “tactical repertoires” – namely, the legalist integrationism practiced by the NAACP and the “Negro first” strategy of racial uplift long practiced by the black middle class.⁶⁸ Throughout the early 1950s, the NAACP represented “the vanguard of black ‘radicalism,’” with its legalist program culminating in the landmark Supreme Court decision to desegregate public education “with all deliberate speed” in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).⁶⁹ *Brown* represented a significant legal victory in the battle for first-class citizenship. Still, as Haines notes, “The resolute southern resistance to desegregation and the expansion of civil rights” would eventually expose “the limitations of legalism as a means for bringing about social change.”⁷⁰ Recognizing the failure of black middle-class civil rights tactics, primarily legal and “symbolic Negro” strategies, to improve black people’s everyday lives, African American militants started to

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

⁶⁸ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 26.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

challenge the belief that exceptional black individuals would facilitate racial equality for all black Americans. In 1963, one such critic argued:

Modern history is filled with ‘Negro firsts’ Nevertheless, for a few Negroes to gain status in American society and then to serve as symbols of freedom for all Black people; it’s a sham and a fraud. Firstly, the majority of Black people still suffer, and secondly, many of the new token Negroes no longer endear themselves to the Black community, but rather they assume a modern slave mentality.⁷¹

Suggesting that black firsts upheld “the illusion of equality,” while “obscuring the fact that there has been very little improvement in the lives of the black masses,” Lena Horne and other “symbolic Negroes” were accused of assuming a modern slave mentality by serving the interests of white America, rather than those of African American majority.⁷²

Recognizing that the legalist and “symbolic Negro” tactics advocated by the NAACP and its leaders would leave the everyday lives of African Americans – especially those living in the repressive South – unchanged, civil rights activists increasingly adopted “a new style of collective action” – nonviolent direct protest – effectively redefining black militancy. By 1960, the direct action integrationism and grassroots organizing practiced by CORE, SCLC, SNCC, and young students across the South had supplanted the NAACP’s legalism “in the spectrum of black radicalism.”⁷³ While several local NAACP branches practiced direct action tactics in an effort to facilitate integration, the national office and the majority of branches largely eschewed them, remaining committed to its program of legalist integrationism.⁷⁴ Many critics would censure the NAACP’s hesitance to support nonviolent direct action, gaining the Association a

⁷¹ “Interview with Ernest X, June 18, 1963” in *The Revolutionary: A Black People’s History of Armed Resistance to Racism and Other Forms of Oppression*, vol. 1, ed. Kobie Coleman, 34-42 (Lincoln: iUniverse Books, 2004), 39.

⁷² Terry Ann Knopf, *Rumors, Race and Riots* (1975; reprint, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 175-176.

⁷³ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 21.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

reputation as “the giant that chose to go slow.”⁷⁵ As Haines suggests, “the NAACP paid a price for its less than total embrace of direct action and for its cumbersome, bureaucratic structure: it lost its preeminence among civil rights groups and tarnished its image among more militant blacks.”⁷⁶

As one of the “Negro firsts” and “onlies” elevated to the status of “Race Heroes” – and a longtime supporter of the NAACP – Lena Horne found her racial authenticity “called into question” during the early 1960s.⁷⁷ With *Lena*, Horne attempts to shape a new persona that reflected these rapidly changing definitions of black racial authenticity and militant civil rights ideology. In order to make this move, Horne replicates “the rhetoric of racial authenticity” constructed by E. Franklin Frazier in his sociological polemic *Black Bourgeoisie*.⁷⁸

In his controversial study, Frazier argues that the black middle class “is without cultural roots in either the Negro world with which it refuses to identify, or the white world which refuses to permit the black bourgeoisie to share its life.”⁷⁹ Frazier contends that the black bourgeoisie experiences “a deep-seated inferiority complex” as a result of its simultaneous rejection of racial “identification with the Negro masses” and rejection by the white majority.⁸⁰ Frazier holds that the black bourgeoisie experiences “considerable self-hatred” evidenced by “the value which it places upon white or light complexion.”⁸¹ In an effort to compensate for these feelings of inferiority and self-hatred, the black bourgeoisie, Frazier suggests, has created an “isolated social world,” a “world of make-believe,” that overemphasizes the significance of individual African

⁷⁵ Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 171.

⁷⁶ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 37-38.

⁷⁷ St. Clair Drake and Horace A. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 391.

⁷⁸ Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 24.

⁷⁹ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 24.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

Americans' accomplishments as a solvent for racism.⁸² Frazier maintains that the black bourgeoisie is misguided in their belief that the achievements of "the relatively few Negroes who have gained recognition in the white world" will expedite African Americans' economic and social equality with whites.⁸³

With *Black Bourgeoisie*, Frazier enacts the "psychodrama" outlined by E. Patrick Johnson in his discussion of black class performances. Rooted in the racism that shaped slave culture and emerging following emancipation, this "psychodrama" between working-class and middle-class blacks developed as a result of real and imagined economic disparities, divergent strategies for racial uplift, "cleavages among blacks around skin color or other physical features associated with black people," and debates over "the notion of an 'authentic' blackness."⁸⁴ In *Black Bourgeoisie*, Frazier constructs the working-class "Negro masses" of "the rural South" – "the culture of the black folk who gave the world the Spirituals" and "the Blues" – as the site of "authentic" blackness.⁸⁵ At the same time, he renders the black bourgeoisie – described as the "'upper-class, light-skinned' Negroes," who "have accepted unconditionally the values of the white bourgeois world" – signifiers of "inauthentic" blackness.⁸⁶

Drawing on Frazier's rhetoric of racial authenticity, Horne reenacts the black middle class versus black working class psychodrama in *Lena* by fashioning the civil rights tactics of an older generation of light-skinned, Northern, urban, "bourgeois" African Americans as inauthentic, and those of a younger generation of darker-skinned, Southern, rural, working class and poor African Americans as authentic. Through *Lena*, Horne attempts to claim racial

⁸² *Ibid.*, 23, 25, 174, 179, 190.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 190, 174, 179, 190, 194.

⁸⁴ E. Patrick Johnson, "Foreword: The Journey from Bourgeois to Boogie" in *From Bourgeois to Boogie: Black Middle-Class Performances*, eds. Vershawn Ashanti Young and Bridget Harris Tsemo, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), xiv; Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 3.

⁸⁵ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 2, 117, 112, 117-118.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, 117, 118.

authenticity by denouncing the “symbolic Negro” strategy of the black middle class and aligning herself with the tactics of direct action integrationism. To make this move, Horne must explain and reject her past persona – the “symbolic Lena” – as a racially inauthentic construction of the black bourgeoisie, and fashion a new racially “authentic” one – the “real” Lena – constructed as an individual “Negro” woman who aligns herself with the black masses.⁸⁷

In order to “re-identify [herself] with the Negro people,” Horne must explain the circumstances that have estranged her from “the average Negro.” She suggests that this estrangement is the result of her black bourgeois heritage as well as of her years of exploitation by whites and blacks as a reluctant “symbol of Negro aspirations” and “the approaching rapprochement between the races.”⁸⁸ Although Horne argues that she has been “equally exploited and equally aided by individuals of both races,” who have used “the symbolic” Lena to “advance their interests,” she reserves the greater part of her criticism for the black elite.⁸⁹ She condemns the “Negro organizations” and “influential Negroes,” namely the NAACP and its former executive secretary Walter White, for “using” her to advance the “false” promises of black bourgeoisie. Ultimately, *Lena* represents Horne’s appeal to the folk for acceptance, revealing her desire to “belong, to be seen as ‘part of the group, as authentic.’”⁹⁰

“THE WORLD OF THE NEGRO MIDDLE CLASS”

“Grandmother’s Little Lady”

The first chapter of *Lena* sets the stage for Horne’s new, “real” persona by establishing the origins of the former persona she seeks to reject – the “symbolic Lena” – in the black middle class. A reading of Horne’s performances in *In Person* illuminates the extent to which she relied

⁸⁷ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 143, 293, 274, 276, 270.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 271, 194, 276.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 193, 297, 233.

⁹⁰ Vershawn Ashanti Young, *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*, kindle ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), loc. 95.

on Frazier's polemic *Black Bourgeoisie* to shape her childhood and resulting persona in *Lena*. With her second autobiography, Horne perpetuates "the fantasy wherein race marks class."⁹¹ As scholar Vershawn Ashanti Young notes, "[M]any...middle-class African Americans experience a psychological dilemma: their class status is linked to a white racial identity, and their racial identity is linked to a lower-class status. To reconcile this predicament many attempt unsuccessfully to identify with one, the white racial world, or the other, the black class world, since to repeat the familiar expression, they are caught between two worlds."⁹² Throughout *Lena*, Horne performs this psychological dilemma.

In *Black Bourgeoisie*, Frazier describes that the black middle class as "without cultural roots in either the Negro world with which it refuses to identify, or the white world which refuses to permit the black bourgeoisie to share its life"; as a consequence, Frazier maintains, the black bourgeoisie has created an isolated social world of its own – "a world of make-believe."⁹³ Echoing Frazier's rhetoric, Horne situates herself as "virtually rootless in the world," a "stranger in the white world" as well as an "alien in the world of the average Negro."⁹⁴ Concerned with exploring "the forces that shaped me and who I have been," Horne suggests that her role as a symbol of and for her race was, at least in part, a result of the "world into which I was born...the world of the Negro middle class."⁹⁵ Self-representing as a member of "one of the 'First Families' of Brooklyn," Horne outlines a family history she describes as consistent with "the

⁹¹ Vershawn Ashanti Young, "Introduction: Performing Citizenship" in *From Bourgeois to Boogie: Black Middle-Class Performances*, eds. Vershawn Ashanti Young and Bridget Harris Tsemo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 16.

⁹² Vershawn Ashanti Young, "Introduction" in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 16.

⁹³ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 24.

⁹⁴ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 2-3, 271.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 296, 3.

patterns that sociologists – those few who have studied the so-called black bourgeoisie” identified.⁹⁶

In his treatise on the black bourgeoisie, Frazier argues that class stratification, “based upon social distinctions such as education and conventional behavior, rather than upon occupation and income,” developed among African Americans following Emancipation:

At the top of the social pyramid there was a small upper class. The superior status of this class was due chiefly to its differentiation from the great mass of the Negro population because of a family heritage which resulted partly from its mixed ancestry. ...The members’ light skin color was indicative not only of their white ancestry, but of their descent from the Negroes who were free before the Civil War, or those who had enjoyed the advantages of having served in the houses of their masters. ...The members of the upper class depended on a number of skilled occupations for living, though there was a sprinkling of teachers, doctors, educated ministers, and small businessmen among them.⁹⁷

In *Lena*, Horne situates herself as a descendent of this light-skinned “upper class,” by constructing a genealogy that mirrors Frazier’s description of the family heritage shared by members of the black bourgeoisie. Horne, famous for her own “copper color,” describes her father as sharing her “beautiful coppery” hue.⁹⁸ She describes her mother, Edna Scottron Horne, and paternal grandmother, Cora Calhoun Horne, as having “very fair complexions,” so fair that they were sometimes mistaken for white women.⁹⁹ Describing her paternal grandmother as “the direct issue of a slaveowner,” a descendent of “John C. Calhoun, the famous apologist for slavery in pre-Civil War days,” Horne establishes her white ancestry.¹⁰⁰ As evidence of their elite status among African Americans, she also highlights her family members’ educational and occupational histories, which correspond with Frazier’s description of the professions held by the black upper class. Horne, known as the first black glamour girl, self-represents as a member of a family of “Negro firsts” – describing her maternal grandfather as “the first Negro railway post

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, 3.

⁹⁷ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 20.

⁹⁸ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 1, 34.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2, 10.

office clerk,” her maternal grandmother as “one of the handful of ‘first’ Negro teachers in the [Brooklyn] public schools,” and her paternal great uncle as the “first Negro sheriff of incredible strength in a small Indiana county.”¹⁰¹ In so doing, Horne highlights the black bourgeoisie’s elevation of “Negro firsts” and suggests that she was groomed, as a child of this class, to become a “‘first Negro to’...”¹⁰² By doing so, Horne prepares her audience for her later discussion and critique of her famous “firsts” as a singer with Noble Sissle’s Orchestra and in her solo career as a Hollywood actress and nightclub singer.

As a child of the black bourgeoisie, Horne self-represents her young self as performing the “respectable middle-class Brooklyn girl.”¹⁰³ As performance scholar Vershawn Ashanti Young notes, “the term *middle class*, when used in association with African Americans...defies neat definition.”¹⁰⁴ Scholars, like Deborah Gray White, Kevin K. Gaines, and Martin Summers, argue that the black middle class differed significantly from the larger white American middle class as they rarely shared their socioeconomic status. Rather, they define the black elite as a group of African Americans who have historically coalesced around an ideological concern with racial uplift and the performance of a bourgeois “‘style of life.’”¹⁰⁵ Among the black middle class, uplift emphasized the performance of middle-class standards of respectability as a means of gaining whites America’s “recognition of their humanity by distinguishing themselves, as bourgeois agents of civilization, from the presumably undeveloped black majority.”¹⁰⁶

Respectability, “a sociohistorical concept,” involves the presentation of certain gendered

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7, 12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁰⁴ Vershawn Ashanti Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 70; also see Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 2-3; and Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 6-7.

¹⁰⁶ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 1, 2.

standards of morality, sexuality, dress, cleanliness, and comportment that, along with real economic differences, are used to emphasize the dominant bourgeoisie's separation from the working class.¹⁰⁷

As Martin Summers suggests, the black middle class, more so than the larger middle class, is characterized “by its self-conscious positioning against the black working class – through its adherence to a specific set of social values and the public performance of those values – than by real educational and occupational differences.”¹⁰⁸ At the same time the black elite positioned itself against the black majority, it positioned itself as worthy of social and political integration with the larger middle class by appropriating its performances of bourgeois ideals and behaviors. Although uplift and respectability politics strengthened the hegemonic values of the larger American middle class, they also “represented the struggle for a positive black identity in a deeply racist society.”¹⁰⁹ These scholars emphasize the importance of understanding “that uplift ideology was not simply a matter of educated African Americans wanting to be white, as E. Franklin Frazier’s polemic...suggested,” nor was the politics of respectability “an accomodationist stance toward racism.”¹¹⁰ Still, the black elite’s disapproval of black working-class practices and behaviors reflected an “unconscious internalized racism” that stressed class over racial solidarity in the struggle to gain citizenship rights.¹¹¹ Whereas Frazier suggests that the black bourgeoisie practices racial conservatism – “expressed by an acquiescent, accomodationist, subordinate approach to race relations in exchange for increased economic

¹⁰⁷ Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, 87. In addition to Summers’s book, significant texts exploring African Americans’ relationship to respectability politics, include Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁸ Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 3.

¹¹⁰ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 3; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 187

¹¹¹ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 6.

security” – scholar Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham argues that the politics of racial uplift through the performance of respectability “combined both a conservative and a radical impulse.”¹¹²

As Gaines illuminates, uplift “has held mixed meanings for African Americans” since the late nineteenth century.¹¹³ The majority of the “mulatto elite,” self-proclaimed leaders of the African American masses, subscribed to W. E. B. Du Bois’s theory of racial uplift, his “Talented Tenth model of progress,” discussed in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).¹¹⁴ Believing that “the Negro race [would] be saved by its exceptional men,” Du Bois charged the black elite with producing a “college-educated class whose mission would be to serve and guide” – to uplift – “the Mass” to civil and economic equality through liberal education and political protest.¹¹⁵ In addition to acting as race leaders, Du Bois believed that the Talented Tenth – an allusion to the “top” 10 percent of the black community – should challenge racist stereotypes by acting as exemplars of black ability and middle-class respectability.¹¹⁶

The women of the black bourgeoisie, described by Brooks Higginbotham as “the Female Talented Tenth,” engaged in numerous social-work activities and “expressed a race-consciousness that united black men and women in a struggle for racial dignity and self-determination.”¹¹⁷ At the same time, they “disseminated middle-class morals and values among

¹¹² Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 5; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 187.

¹¹³ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 1, 2. On the “mulatto elite,” see Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 31.

¹¹⁴ Russell, Wilson, and Hall, *The Color Complex*, 31-32; Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, 67.

¹¹⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois quoted in Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 68; W. E. B. Du Bois quoted in Dale Edwyna Smith, “Talented Tenth,” *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Paul Finkelman, Oxford African American Studies Center, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/opr/t0005/e1157> (accessed February 18, 2012).

¹¹⁶ Russell, Wilson, and Hall, *The Color Complex*, 31; David Levering Lewis, “Parallels and Divergences: Assimilationist Strategies of Afro-American and Jewish Elites from 1910 to Early 1930s” in *Strangers and Neighbors: Relations between Blacks and Jews in the United States*, eds. Maurianne Adams and John Brace, 331-351 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 339; Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, 67-68; Smith, “Talented Tenth” in *Encyclopedia of African American History*.

¹¹⁷ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 20, 45.

the masses.”¹¹⁸ In particular, black clubwomen placed much emphasis on the performance of respectability as a means of uplifting the race in the eyes of white Americans. As Gray White documents, black clubwomen sought to challenge the dominant culture’s stereotypical images of African American women as sexually depraved or masculine mammies by claiming the title “lady” – with its connotations of decency, purity, honor, and femininity – through the performance of respectability.¹¹⁹ Describing her young self as “my grandmother’s little lady,” Horne represents her paternal grandmother as a significant figure in her early life and a strong influence on her personality, insisting she conform to bourgeois standards of conduct and shielding her from the racist “world which most Negroes inhabit and with which they are forced, from birth, to come to terms.”¹²⁰ Insulated within “the world of the Negro middle class,” *Lena*’s Horne must accompany her mother on her journey south to gain knowledge of “the world of the average Negro.”¹²¹

Interlude: “The Years I Spent in the South”¹²²

As a black middle-class woman, Horne is excluded from Frazier’s definition of the folk, and therefore, is considered unable to “express the ‘authentic’ African American experience.”¹²³ In constructing her autobiography, Horne has learned, in J. Martin Favor’s words, to “work [herself] into a strategic alliance with folk privilege by consciously emphasizing aspects of heritage and experience that link [her] to the folk.”¹²⁴ In *Lena*, Horne’s childhood experiences in the South assume a greater significance and garner more attention than in her earlier *In Person* performance. Horne’s extensive consideration of her time in the South and her representation of

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹⁹ White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 60, 66; Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies’ Pages: African American Women’s Magazines and the Culture That Made Them* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 53.

¹²⁰ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 22, 3.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 3, 271.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²³ Favor, *Authentic Blackness*, 13.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

its effects on her personality, reflect her “crisis of authenticity” during an historical moment when “definition[s] of black identity and its corollary of authenticity” are rapidly changing, privileging “the critical discourse of blackness that the places the ‘folk’ – southern, rural, and poor – at its forefront.”¹²⁵ Horne describes her relocation from the North, through Washington, and into the South as “my introduction to Jim Crow” – from “the contemptuous familiarity of the white people when they waited on us in stores” to the horrors of lynching.¹²⁶ Through her portrayal of her southern experiences, she presents race and racism, color and colorism, as constructed systems that she must learn to negotiate. Sheltered from the realities of racism as a child of the “insular” black bourgeoisie, Horne self-represents as having to “learn to be with white people,” which involved a racial performance, learning to follow “certain patterns of behavior” dictated by them – “if you fitted their idea of what a good Negro kid was,” Horne writes, “you would be all right.”¹²⁷ Likewise, Horne suggests that she must journey South to understand the “nuances of color” among African Americans, left undiscussed by her northern, middle-class, light-skinned family members.¹²⁸

Many scholars have discussed “the color complex,” or the politics of skin color among African Americans. Colorism, an outgrowth of the racism that privileges whiteness over blackness, has resulted in what scholar Maxine Leeds Craig refers to as “the African American pigmentocracy,” an interracial and intraracial hierarchy among black Americans that privileges lightness over darkness.¹²⁹ As Johnson argues, “Colorism was almost always undergirded by class distinctions – that somehow dark skin and kinky hair signified low class and fair skin and

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-3, 4.

¹²⁶ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 20, 24.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹²⁹ Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 46-47; also see Russell, Wilson, and Hall, *The Color Complex*.

straight hair signified high class.”¹³⁰ At the same time that light skin and straight hair signified high class, it also came to signify – especially in the late 1950s and 1960s – racial inauthenticity and “self-hatred.” In *Black Bourgeoisie*, Frazier suggested that “the value which [the black middle class] places upon white or light complexion” evidenced “the hollowness of [its] pretended ‘racial pride’” and revealed its “self-hatred.”¹³¹ Within the context of direct action integrationism and the developing Black Power movement, when dark skin and natural hair came to represent badges of racial pride, light skin and straight hair came to represent badges of racial inauthenticity. As a result, Horne foregrounds the politics of skin color, black identity, and authenticity in *Lena*, more so than in her earlier *In Person* performance, constructing her light skin color as a problem that sets her apart, rather than a privilege.¹³²

In the South, Horne acquires a new persona as a “yellow kid from up North.”¹³³ Whereas light skin color afforded the young Horne an invisible status (at least, she submits, invisible to her at the time) within her northern, bourgeois community, Horne suggests she must travel South in order to learn that skin pigmentation signifies – and that this signification varies among African Americans. In the South, Horne suggests she learned that, among some blacks, “light color is far from being a status symbol; in fact, it’s quite the opposite. It is evidence that your lineage has been corrupted by the white people.”¹³⁴ By recalling the taunts of her darker-skinned peers and their accusations of racial inauthenticity, Horne positions herself as ambivalent about her “copper” pigment: “I did not know whether I was supposed to be proud of my color or ashamed of it.”¹³⁵ This move allows Horne to dodge Frazier’s accusations that the black bourgeoisie’s valuation of lightness revealed their “self-hatred.” For the Horne of *Lena*, lightness

¹³⁰ Johnson, “Foreward” to *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, xiv.

¹³¹ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 26.

¹³² Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 31.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

poses a problem – “my color was made fun of” – rather than a source of pride or feelings of superiority.¹³⁶

Likewise, *Lena*’s young Horne’s “speech was made fun of” by classmates who viewed her as a “‘white-talking’ black.”¹³⁷ Due to “the fantasy wherein race marks class,” Horne’s Northern accent and use of the so-called “proper” English favored by the American middle class connote the performance of a white racial identity, construed as racially inauthentic within “the black authenticity hierarchy” that treats a Southern accent and vernacular speech as marks of “real” blackness.¹³⁸ As E. Patrick Johnson notes of the “white-talking” black, “the person’s authenticity is called into question by his or her ‘own’ based not solely on phenotype but also on the symbolic relationship between skin color and the performance of culturally inscribed language or dialect that refers back to an ‘essential’ blackness.”¹³⁹ Therefore, as “yellow kid from up North,” who speaks “formal” English, Horne is “thought to be performing out of racial character, acting white,” because of her phenotype (light-skin and European features) and linguistic performance (northern accent and middle-class diction).¹⁴⁰ Again, Horne reveals that “authenticity” is a construct that is, in many ways, performable, writing, “I learned to change my accent. . . . I learned to bury Lena Calhoun Horne, my grandmother’s little lady, in a corner of my brain. She was no use to me now.”¹⁴¹ Just as Horne learned how to act like “a good Negro kid” around white Southerners, she also learned how to “display” her blackness by modeling the speech patterns and behaviors of her Southern, black classmates.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁷ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 31; Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 5.

¹³⁸ Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 16; Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 29.

¹³⁹ Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 5-6.

¹⁴⁰ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 21; Young, *Your Average Nigga*, loc. 97-102; Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 37n33.

¹⁴¹ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 22.

¹⁴² Young, *Your Average Nigga*, loc. 2281-96.

As Vershawn Ashanti Young proposes, “the requirement to perform race is pervasive” and, among middle class African Americans, often necessitates proficiency in “code switching,” or alternating languages (spoken, as well as cultural) when interacting with differently racialized and classed groups.¹⁴³ In *Lena*, Horne highlights her code-switching ability, writing “I was a changeling, presenting different faces to different people and, to this day, I am two or three people. I can hear myself sometimes even now changing accents from one group to another.”¹⁴⁴ At a young age, the textual Horne learns to negotiate three separate worlds – the white world, the world of the “average Negro,” and the world of the black bourgeoisie – by performing different context-specific personas but feels at “home” in none. When *Lena*’s Horne returns north, she “presents a different face,” performs a different persona, than the “face,” the persona, she presented to her southern peers.

“The Respectable Middle-Class Brooklyn Girl”¹⁴⁵

When the textual Horne returns north to live with her grandparents, she resumes the persona of a “respectable middle-class Brooklyn girl,” cultivated by her grandmother, who, like many of the Female Talented Tenth, “perceived respectability to be the first step in [communicating black humanity to] white America.”¹⁴⁶ In *Lena*, Horne portrays her paternal grandmother, Cora Calhoun Horne, as “a devoted clubwoman,” suffragist, active NAACP and NUL member, and an “ardent fighter for Negro causes.”¹⁴⁷ In addition to viewing the performance of respectability as the obligation of middle-class black women, Horne suggests that her grandmother viewed “good works” on behalf of the race as their equally important responsibility, writing, “the part of me that responds to causes or injustices, or issues fighting

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, loc. 198-99, 260-61, 268-70, 2281-96.

¹⁴⁴ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 32.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁴⁶ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 196.

¹⁴⁷ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 2, 9-10, 31-32.

statements on all kinds of issues, that part of me is the creation of my proud, activist grandmother.”¹⁴⁸ Of her grandmother’s “many good works,” Horne describes the NAACP as “rank[ing] highest in her interest.”¹⁴⁹

Horne’s relationship to the NAACP is central to the narrative self that *Lena* fashions. From the beginning of the autobiography, Horne emphasizes her connection to the NAACP. She recalls attending civil rights organization meetings with her grandmother as a young child and highlights a “clipping” from the October 1919 issue of the Association’s *Branch Bulletin* that featured a photograph of Horne at two-years-old; she describes the photograph as captioned: “‘This is a picture of one of the youngest members of the N.A.A.C.P. Her name is Lena Calhoun Horne.’”¹⁵⁰ As a child of the black bourgeoisie, Horne implies, she was primed to support its preferred civil rights organization – the NAACP.

The NAACP, *the* “White Negro,” and the “Symbolic Lena”

Founded in 1909 by an interracial group of northern, urban elites, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People emerged from W. E. B. Du Bois’s Niagara Movement (1905-1910), an organization of black intellectuals formed in opposition to the accommodationist philosophy of Booker T. Washington. Embracing the Niagara Movement’s platform, the NAACP viewed militant protest and litigation as the most effective strategies for securing the Constitutional rights guaranteed African Americans but denied them under Jim Crow.¹⁵¹ Described by Haines as “separate-but-equal legalism,” the legal program adopted by the

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 42, 48.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9, 11.

¹⁵¹ August Meier and John H. Bracey, Jr., “The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: ‘To Reach the Conscience of America,’” *Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (1993): 4, 7; Manfred Berg, “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Paul Finkelman, Oxford African American Studies Center, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/opr/t0005/e0862> (accessed February 18, 2012).

NAACP “was aimed not at attacking segregation directly but rather toward enforcing the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution and ensuring the equality of provisions under the separate-but-equal doctrine laid down in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.”¹⁵² In addition to challenging institutional racism by exposing the unconstitutionality of disfranchisement and fighting for equality under segregation, the NAACP sought to foster race pride and dispute negative stereotypes by promoting the accomplishments of the race’s “exceptional men [and women],” its Talented Tenth.¹⁵³ In their effort to challenge racist stereotypes of African Americans, the NAACP launched public protests against racism in the burgeoning film industry. In 1915, the Association – realizing the growing significance of Hollywood images in shaping the public perception of African Americans – picketed the New York opening of D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* in protest against the film’s racist depiction of black Americans; riots erupted when the film premiered in Boston and Chicago.¹⁵⁴ With the *Birth of a Nation* protests, the Association commenced what film historian Thomas Cripps describes as its “half-century career of lobbying in Hollywood studios,” a campaign that would prove central to Horne’s career and autobiographical performance.¹⁵⁵

Following World War I, the NAACP leadership continued its tactical strategy of petitioning for basic civil rights through legal channels; at the same time, it adopted a second innovative tactic – “art as a solvent for racism” – that launched the Harlem Renaissance.¹⁵⁶ Also referred to as the New Negro Movement or the New Negro Renaissance, the Harlem Renaissance describes a period, dating approximately from 1919 to 1929, when the Talented

¹⁵² Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 19.

¹⁵³ Meier and Bracey, “The NAACP as a Reform Movement,” 6-8, 11.

¹⁵⁴ Russell, Wilson, and Hall, *The Color Complex*, 144.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (1977; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 43.

¹⁵⁶ Lewis, “Parallels and Divergences” in *Strangers and Neighbors*, 342; Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 72.

Tenth and the NAACP promoted “New Negroes,” exceptional black writers, artists, musicians, and actors, as the “best hope for shattering racial boundaries and removing obstacles to the success and status of the black intelligentsia.”¹⁵⁷ As early as the 1920s, the NAACP’s strategy of sponsoring “symbolic Negroes” – those whose special talents and performances of black respectability earned them favor among whites – earned them a reputation as an organization primarily concerned with issues affecting the black elite. As Haines notes, although the NAACP had emerged in militant opposition to Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist philosophy, and “through most of its development...has been widely perceived as radical,” the leaders of the national branch eventually gained a reputation as racial conservatives “focus[ed on] *caste* issues such as discrimination in public accommodations rather than such *class* issues as employment and welfare.”¹⁵⁸ In 1957, Frazier criticized the “middle-class outlook” of the Association’s leadership in *Black Bourgeoisie*, censuring its “refus[al] to change the general orientation of its program” toward the working class.¹⁵⁹ When Horne wrote *Lena* in 1965, a new generation of black militants challenged the NAACP’s tactics as “too timid, its policies too closely tied to the prevailing powers, its strategies unlikely to achieve timely results,” its leaders as “Uncle Toms.”¹⁶⁰ In her effort to distance herself from strategies no longer perceived as militant or radical, and align herself with the “direct action integrationism” of the “Southern Negro Revolution,” Horne uses *Lena* to disavow her reputation as “a tool of the NAACP.”¹⁶¹

In *Lena*, Horne self-represents as a reluctant “symbol of certain Negro aspirations,” aspirations defined by the people “who represented the Negro organizations, the Negro

¹⁵⁷ Edward E. Waldron, *Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1978), 23; see Favor, *Authentic Blackness*, 3; Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 226.

¹⁵⁸ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 18-19.

¹⁵⁹ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 103, 104.

¹⁶⁰ Julian Bond, “Foreward” to *Freedom’s Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969*, by Gilbert Jonas (New York: Routledge, 2005), xv.

¹⁶¹ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 29; Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 284, 137.

leadership,” aspirations largely defined by Walter White and the NAACP.¹⁶² As historian Edward E. Waldron notes, “To many people Walter White and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People were synonymous.”¹⁶³ As the Association’s assistant secretary for thirteen years before serving as its executive secretary from 1931 until his death in 1955, many “thought of Walter White as *being* the NAACP.”¹⁶⁴ Horne replicates this construction of White as “Mr. NAACP” in her efforts to distance her present self, as the narrator of *Lena*, from her earlier symbolic self.¹⁶⁵ She writes, “The influential Negroes who advised me and helped me early in my career wanted me to be a symbol of Negro aspirations, and I had accepted that role unwillingly and came, in time, to hate it, too.”¹⁶⁶ Accused of “becoming a white Negro,” Horne self-constructs as “used by” and resistant to the racial uplift tradition espoused by *the* “white Negro,” Walter White.¹⁶⁷ Described by his contemporary George Schuyler as “one of the whitest white men ever to have an octoroon for a grandfather,” White was a blond-haired, blue-eyed, “white”-skinned “voluntary Negro.”¹⁶⁸

As Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall note, among the mulatto elite, “it was often those Blacks light enough to pass who became the Black community’s most vocal and active leaders”; this was certainly true of Walter White.¹⁶⁹ Despite his ability to live as a white man, White chose to “live in the Black world and identify with its experiences.”¹⁷⁰ With White at its helm, the NAACP established its Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), with Thurgood

¹⁶² Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 194, 143.

¹⁶³ Waldron, *Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁶⁵ Kenneth Robert Janken, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁶⁶ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 293-294.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁶⁸ Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 131; Lewis, “Parallels and Divergences” in *Strangers and Neighbors*, 335; Kenneth Robert Janken, “Walter White and Passing,” *Du Bois Review* 2 (March 2005): 17.

¹⁶⁹ Russell, Wilson, and Hall, *The Color Complex*, 35.

¹⁷⁰ Janken, “Walter White and Passing,” 17.

Marshall as director, launching a legal campaign against segregation, chiefly within the nation's public schools.¹⁷¹ Through litigation and legislation, the LDF achieved many civil rights victories, notably the historic Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine undergirding legal segregation.¹⁷² In addition to advocating legalistic integrationism, White was "notorious" for his belief in the power of "symbolic Negroes" to challenge racist stereotypes and facilitate integration, an antiracist approach David Levering Lewis describes as a "litigation and literature" strategy dating back to his days as "nursemaid" to the Harlem Renaissance.¹⁷³

As Waldron notes, Walter White believed in the power of "symbolic Negroes" – talented black novelists, poets, painters, sculptors, singers and actors – to challenge discrimination.¹⁷⁴ "I am convinced," wrote White in 1927, "that there is no single factor of greater importance in solving this thing we call the race problem than the work of Negro artists, or in bringing new respect and a new rearrangement of values and opinions concerning the Negro than the work of Negro artists."¹⁷⁵ White's "symbolic Negro" strategy falls squarely within what Gaines describes as the black bourgeoisie's "class-bound uplift tradition by which blacks took up the burden of proving themselves" worthy of social integration with whites.¹⁷⁶ White encouraged and promoted, individually and under the auspices of the NAACP, many artists of the Harlem Renaissance including Horne's predecessor Florence Mills and mentor Paul Robeson. Naming

¹⁷¹ Robert L. Zangrando, "Walter Francis White," *American National Biography Online*, eds. Mark C. Carnes and John A. Garraty, Oxford African American Studies Center, available from <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/article/anb/1500755> (accessed February 29, 2012).

¹⁷² "History," NAACP Legal Defense Fund, available from <http://www.naacpldf.org/history> (accessed February 29, 2012).

¹⁷³ Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, 19; Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 139, 192-193; Lewis, "Parallels and Divergences" in *Strangers and Neighbors*, 346.

¹⁷⁴ Sterling A. Brown, interview, July 17, 1974, quoted in Waldron, *Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance*, 20.

¹⁷⁵ Walter White to Ethel Bedient Gilbert, March 2, 1927, NAACP files, quoted in Waldron, *Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance*, 117-118.

¹⁷⁶ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 226.

Mills among “the more outstanding men and women of the race,” White lectured the *Dixie to Broadway* (1924) star to avoid roles “with too much ‘vulgarity’ and ‘stereotyping’” that would reflect poorly on African Americans; he would later deliver this same lecture to Horne when she was offered the lead in *St. Louis Blues*.¹⁷⁷ In addition to endorsing the “undoubted genius” of Mills, White boasted that Paul Robeson chose the musical profession over one in the law based on his counsel.¹⁷⁸ Befriending Robeson in 1924, White became instrumental in his early singing and recording career and the NAACP man’s influence is evident in Robeson’s early confidence “that art can bridge the gulf between the white and black races.”¹⁷⁹ Although Robeson would later “reject the view equating individual success with racial uplift, and its attendant achievement ideology,” White would continue to view “symbolic Negroes” as powerful tools in the fight against racism.¹⁸⁰

In addition to promoting Harlem Renaissance artists, White assumed a key role in NAACP’s decades-long crusade to end racism in Hollywood. As discussed in chapter two, White called on the film capital to “stamp out distorted representations of [black] people” and “to depict the Negro in films as a normal human being and an integral part of the life of America and the world.”¹⁸¹ In 1942, compelled by the wartime government, several of the Hollywood studio heads agreed to the Association’s demands, promising to abandon on-screen stereotypical

¹⁷⁷ Walter White to Ethel Clark, September 28, 1925, NAACP files, quoted in Waldron, *Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance*, 118-119; Walter White to Florence Mills, December 8, 1924, quoted in Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 137; also see Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 164.

¹⁷⁸ Walter White to Ethel Bedient Gilbert, March 2, 1927, NAACP files, quoted in Waldron, *Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance*, 117-118; Lewis, “Parallels and Divergences” in *Strangers and Neighbors*, 344; Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 138.

¹⁷⁹ Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 70; Waldron, *Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance*, 162; Paul Robeson quoted in Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 71.

¹⁸⁰ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 250-251.

¹⁸¹ “White Hits Distorted Movie Roles 2nd Time,” *Afro-American*, October 23, 1943, 8, annotated in Charlene B. Regester, *Black Entertainers in African American Newspaper Articles: An Annotated Bibliography of the Chicago Defender, the Afro-American (Baltimore), the Los Angeles Sentinel and the New York Amsterdam News, 1910-1950*, vol. 1 (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2002), 468, brackets in Regester; Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (1948; reprint, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 201.

portrayals of African Americans by casting black actors in plausible roles and beginning the process of integrating African Americans into behind-the-scenes positions as studio technicians.¹⁸² Suggesting White was “interested in creating a new symbol that might be useful” in his campaign “to bend the color line in movies still further,” Horne writes, “I think that he felt that [I] might be an interesting weapon to try on the moguls.”¹⁸³ As a light-skinned member of the black bourgeoisie, who performed middle class respectability onstage and off, Lena Horne represented Walter White’s ideal symbol of “the Negro [woman] as a normal human being,” a symbol meant to raise the status of middle-class African Americans in the eyes of white America and facilitate their economic and social integration with whites. With *Lena*, Horne submits that she reluctantly assumed this symbolic position, pressured by White and other leaders of the black bourgeoisie. By claiming, “I never liked the role, but I had gone with it,” Horne suggests that she, unlike White, has never been comfortable with the “symbolic Negro” strategy. By self-constructing the younger Lena as an unwilling symbol of the black bourgeoisie, Horne the narrator works to lend credibility to her present denunciation of the “symbolic Lena”:

I began to think, What an ass I’ve been all these years. Back in the days when I had gone to Hollywood for the first time, people like Walter White had spent a lot of time telling me to be on my best behavior, to remember that I was the first of my race to be given such an opportunity in the movies. And I had, mostly, been a good little symbol. I had tried not to step out of line, not to make a fuss. And now it seemed to me that Walter had been wrong and I had been wrong, too. I had been a false symbol.¹⁸⁴

Responding to current definitions of “authentic” blackness and radical protest, Horne echoes the militant critique of “Negro firsts” as fraudulent “symbols of freedom for all Black people” because, despite their individual successes, “the majority of Black people still suffer.”¹⁸⁵ She writes, “all of us ‘firsts’ – first glamour girl, first baseball player, first this-and-the-other – had

¹⁸² Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, 3.

¹⁸³ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 121, 143.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁸⁵ “Interview with Ernest X” in *The Revolutionary*, 39.

reached the end of our usefulness. We were not symbols of the approaching rapprochement between the races. We were sops, tokens, buy-offs for the white race's conscious."¹⁸⁶ Likewise, Horne acknowledges that although "[f]inancially and socially [her] role as a symbol had certainly paid off" for her, personally, it had done very little to improve the life of "the average Negro."¹⁸⁷ She argues:

All of us who had been symbols of Negro aspirations for the past couple of decades, had minded our manners, been responsible, reasonable people we were supposed to be, and nothing had come of it. Down South very few more Negroes could vote now than had been able to then. Most Negro kids still get poor educations, were denied equal opportunities in employment, in housing, in everything else. ...A new generation was taking over. And they were not interested in being symbols. They knew the symbol was obsolete – before I did. They were not interested in appeasing the white man, in cajoling favors from him. They were demanding their rights and not getting them yet. They knew my generation had been sold a false bill of goods – and I was just learning it.¹⁸⁸

Here Horne describes "symbolic Negroes" as an ineffectual tool of the inauthentic "world of the Negro middle class." She argues that "symbolic Negroes," despite efforts to prove their humanity – and that of all African Americans – by acting as polite, reasonable, goodwill ambassadors only succeeded in bolstering "the white man's" illusion of democracy and racial equality through their token inclusion in the American Dream. This token inclusion, while benefiting individual African Americans economically and socially, had done little to "uplift" the race as a whole; the majority of black Americans, especially in the South, continued face prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalized racism in voting, education, employment, and housing. Whereas Horne fashions the "symbolic Lena" as an inauthentic construction of the world of the black bourgeoisie, she suggests that the "Southern Negro Revolution" that has emerged from the black masses facilitates the emergence of the "real," authentic Lena.

¹⁸⁶ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 276.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 271-272.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 271.

“THE WORLD OF THE AVERAGE NEGRO”¹⁸⁹

In *Black Bourgeoisie*, Frazier constructs the working-class “Negro masses” of “the rural South” as the site of “authentic” blackness, a construction that Horne, in many ways, replicates in *Lena*.¹⁹⁰ In order for the “real,” racially authentic Lena to emerge, the textual Horne must return South “to the world of the average Negro” – “I wanted to go South. But I wondered whether Southern Negroes could possibly accept someone like me, a Northerner, not a notable militant, rather a worn-out symbol of another era of racial struggles. But I did want to go, I had to go. I felt something inexplicable drawing me South.”¹⁹¹ Horne’s account of her decision to join Medgar Evers and Dick Gregory in the Jackson, Mississippi protests of early June 1963 and of her reception there work to establish her new racially “authentic” persona. She writes, “I was scared to death, but not of the white Southerners. I was afraid of the Negroes, afraid that they might reject me. Who the hell was I to go to Jackson, Mississippi, to give those people the benefit of my worldly wisdom?”¹⁹² Known as the “symbolic Lena” – constructed by Horne as a racially “inauthentic,” black middle-class woman – Horne suggests she feared a negative response from “the Southern Negro people,” who might view her in terms of the role she seeks to reject. “However,” she writes,

I had underestimated the natural kindness and gentleness of the Southern Negro people and they were wonderful to me, although I certainly did not inspire them in any way. They don’t need ‘celebrities’ to come down and inspire them. To use an old-fashioned phrase, theirs is a people’s revolution and they have their own leaders who, like Medgar Evers, lead every day by example. But they were good to me. They gave me much more than I could possibly give them.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁹⁰ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 2, 117, 112, 117-118.

¹⁹¹ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 281.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 283-284.

Recognizing the importance of Southern grassroots leaders, “idealistic leaders like Medgar or Martin Luther King,” the textual Lena works to further distance herself from the “symbolic Negro” strategy represented by Walter White and the national branch of the NAACP to align herself with the “Southern Negro Revolution.” Yet, in describing “the Southern Negroes,” Horne perpetuates stereotypes of southern African Americans as naturally kind and gentle. Similarly, by representing the Southern civil rights movement as “expressing a very pure thing,” Horne re-inscribes stereotypes of urban “Northern Negroes” as “inauthentic,” corrupted by white society, and rural “Southern Negroes” as arbiters of “authentic” and “pure” blackness.¹⁹⁴ By privileging the “folk” – imagined in *Lena* as a “new generation” of southern, rural, dark-skinned, working class and poor African Americans who embrace the direct action tactics of CORE, SNCC, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s SCLC – “as a more authentically black site” than the “black bourgeoisie” – imagined in *Lena* as an “interim” generation of northern, urban, light-skinned, middle class African Americans who support the legalistic and symbolic tactics of Walter White and the NAACP’s old guard – Horne re-inscribes “the black authenticity hierarchy” that defines the black middle class as “race-fake.”¹⁹⁵

Ultimately, through this textual performance, Horne represents Southern black acceptance as facilitating the emergence of the “real,” racially “authentic” Lena – as “granting [her] the right to act for [herself] and not as a symbolic figure.”¹⁹⁶ Horne fashions the “true” Lena – “a really basic, earthy, human being” who longs to join the Southern civil rights movement “as a private Negro person” – in opposition to the “symbolic Lena” – “the sleek,

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁹⁵ Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 29; Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 271, 288, 283-284, 295; Young, *Your Average Nigga*, loc. 97-102.

¹⁹⁶ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 295.

sophisticated lady of the cabarets” and “symbol of certain Negro aspirations.”¹⁹⁷ Through *Lena*, the textual Horne transforms from “the symbolic me,” representative of the small, “isolated” world of black bourgeoisie, to “the real me,” who draws strength from and allies herself with the “mass” of “Negro people,” claiming racial authenticity based on her acceptance by the black people of Jackson, Mississippi.¹⁹⁸

CONCLUSION

In her “attempt to be ‘down with the cause,’” Horne constructs the black bourgeoisie as “less black,” placing herself “in an awkward position when [she aligns herself] with the ‘folk’ in order to allay [her] own guilt about being middle class.”¹⁹⁹ As an undeniably middle-class black woman, Horne places herself in a problematic situation. As Vershawn Ashanti Young suggests, “the central point” of Frazier’s *Black Bourgeoisie* is “that middle-class status for blacks in the United States tends to require a conservative rather than a radical racial perspective.”²⁰⁰ Like the discursive construction of the black bourgeoisie as “apolitical” – “assimilating sellouts, phenotypically black but politically and ideologically white” – espoused by the black militants described by E. Patrick Johnson in the 1960s, Frazier’s representation of the black bourgeoisie “as the site of capitulation in the face of racial strife [...seemingly] forecloses the possibility of middle-class inclusion in antiracist struggle.”²⁰¹ Yet, although Horne may represent the black bourgeoisie as inauthentic, she never suggests that, as a class, they are apolitical, rather she submits that their past political tactics were misguided, in her words, “wrong.”²⁰² Through *Lena*, Horne struggles to imagine a different way of being a politically militant middle-class black woman.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 258-259.

¹⁹⁸ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 3, 259, 274, 276, 296, 297.

¹⁹⁹ Johnson *Appropriating Blackness*, 23-24; also see Favor, *Authentic Blackness*, 13.

²⁰⁰ Young, “Introduction” in *From Bourgeois to Boogie*, 5.

²⁰¹ Johnson *Appropriating Blackness*, 22, 24, 25; also see Favor, *Authentic Blackness*, 4.

²⁰² Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 270.

Like historian John H. Bracey, “a child of the same middle class that Frazier was attacking,” the primary lesson Horne seems to take away from Frazier is “not to be like the people in *Black Bourgeoisie*.”²⁰³ Bracey, describing “what [he] learned most from Frazier,” writes:

If [living like the black bourgeoisie was] what we were doing with our lives, we should stop and think about it. And there was an impulse that came out of *Black Bourgeoisie* that made a whole generation of young people in the black middle class say that whatever we want to be, we don’t want to be that. And I think that was what Frazier’s point was. He held up a mirror and said, look at this waste, look at this foolishness you can get involved in. Do you really want to do that? And...a host of...activists responded.²⁰⁴

For the textual Horne, Delta Sigma Theta and the National Council of Negro Women offer her the class-appropriate activist outlet she seeks. Of the Deltas and the NCNW, Horne writes, “They made me feel that my own suspicion of the ability of the middle class to accomplish good works was rather narrow and superficial.”²⁰⁵ In my future work I will discuss Horne attempts to fashion a new persona through her work with these organizations and the effects of the Black Power movement – and its definitions of black radicalism – on her performances of “authentic” blackness during the late 1960s.

Finally, with *Lena*, Horne asserts that the civil rights movement unshackled her from the burden of performing the “symbolic Negro”:

[N]ow I am free. The Negroes no longer need a handful of successful people to symbolize their hopes. They no longer need to live vicariously through us, for they are reaching out to take, *en masse*, what we were ‘given,’ in order to keep them still. History has passed us by – the generation of the celebrity symbols. We are free merely to be human, free to speak, frankly as individuals, not as examples, not as ‘credits’ to our race. And so I do not have to measure myself against an impossible ideal of Negro womanhood and feel shame over my failure to meet the standards. I can, at last, try to be myself.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ John H. Bracey, “Frazier’s *Black Bourgeoisie*: Talented Tenth or Parasitic Class?” in *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie*, ed. James E. Teele, 85-101 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 88.

²⁰⁴ Bracey, “Frazier’s *Black Bourgeoisie*” in *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie*, 88.

²⁰⁵ Horne and Schickel, *Lena*, 268.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 296-297.

As my forthcoming research will demonstrate, although Horne expressed optimism that the movement would free her from her symbolic role, she remained burdened by the requirement to perform her race and by her desire to claim racial authenticity throughout the rest of her life. In spite of Horne's recurrent refusal to identify with her symbolic image through serial autobiographical performances, she could not avoid its internalization; notwithstanding her persistent disavowal, Horne could never fully liberate herself from the "symbolic Lena."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Ruth Amossy, "Autobiographies of Movie Stars: Presentation of Self and Its Strategies," *Poetics Today* 7, no. 4 (1986): 694.

CONCLUSION

In 2002, actress Halle Berry became a “symbolic African American” as the first (and, to date, the only) black woman to receive a Best Actress Oscar for her role in *Monster’s Ball*. In her tearful acceptance speech, Berry asserted “This moment is so much bigger than me,” dedicating the award to her Hollywood predecessors Lena Horne, Dorothy Dandridge, and Diahann Carroll.¹ Nearly a decade later, in 2011, Berry again honored Lena Horne at the Academy Awards. This time, Berry paid homage to the late Horne, recognizing her as a Hollywood trailblazer, in a special tribute during the show’s “In Memoriam” segment.² Berry and countless other fans continue to celebrate Horne’s successful negotiation of a seven-year MGM contract as an important victory in the fight to rid Hollywood of dehumanizing portrayals of blacks on film. Likewise, the importance of MGM’s promotion of Horne as its first black glamour girl is still recognized by many, including Berry, who once commented: “For the first time, people looked at a black woman and really considered her beautiful.”³ Significantly, the light-skinned, straight-haired, biracial Berry, like Horne, is renowned for her beauty; she is consistently listed among the world’s most beautiful people in popular magazines, *Ebony*, *Esquire*, *Essence*, *People*, and *Vanity Fair* among them.

As writer Marita Golden suggests, “Halle Berry now occupies the exalted position of mulatto beauty in Hollywood that Lena Horne once held.”⁴ Arguing that Berry, like Horne, represents “a type of beauty that is acceptable to the cultural pawnbrokers and the movie-going

¹ “Halle Berry Gives Thanks for Her Historic Oscar Win,” *Jet*, April 8, 2002, 16.

² “Halle Berry Pays Tribute to Lena Horne at Oscars,” *Essence.com*, February 28, 2011, available from <http://www.essence.com/2011/02/28/lena-horne-tribute-oscars-halle-berry/#ixzz1oDXHfJj0> (accessed March 5, 2012)

³ Halle Berry quoted in Champ Clark, “The Originals: Six of the First and Finest Remember Their Struggles and Triumphs,” *People* 63, no. 7 (February 21, 2005): 102-112, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 29, 2012).

⁴ Marita Golden, *Don’t Play in the Sun: One Woman’s Journey through the Color Complex* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 97.

audience at large,” Golden proposes that “the near rapturous anointing of Berry as a safe and acceptable symbol of beauty is rooted in Whites’ perception of her as much more White than Black.”⁵ Berry, like Horne in the past, Golden argues, is afforded an “‘honorary White’ status” because her appearance maintains the dominant standard of beauty, which is ultimately “an extension of White political and economic power.”⁶ At the same time, Berry’s success in her chosen field of acting is viewed by many as “proof” that the American Dream is equally available to all regardless of race, class, and gender.

In 1965, Horne argued that the civil rights movement had finally exposed the political ineffectiveness of the “symbolic Negro” strategy for racial advancement, writing “all of us ‘firsts’...had reached the end of our usefulness. We were not symbols of the approaching rapprochement between the races. We were sops, tokens, buy-offs for the white race’s conscious.”⁷ In *Lena*, Horne expresses hope that the civil rights struggles of the late 1950s and early 1960s would make the exploitation of black “firsts” and “onlies” obsolete. Despite Horne’s optimism, “symbolic African Americans” are still used by the dominant culture as “tokens, buy-offs for the white race’s conscious” – as “confirmation” of America’s supposedly colorblind meritocracy at work – when in reality the United States becomes increasingly stratified along racial, gender, and class lines.

Much like Lena Horne, those African Americans, including Berry, whose images are used by the dominant culture to uphold the status quo, are similarly burdened by the requirement to perform their race.⁸ Like Horne, these “symbolic blacks” are usually wealthy, light-skinned African Americans, whose skin color, class standing, and “‘honorary White’ status,” render their

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 87, 97.

⁷ Horne and Schickel, *Lena* (1965; reprint, New York: Limelight Editions, 1986), 276.

⁸ Vershawn Ashanti Young, *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*, kindle ed. (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2007), loc. 198-99.

racial “authenticity” suspect in the eyes of many African Americans. Like Horne, for them, the requirement to perform “authentic” blackness is still pervasive. In Berry’s case, doubts concerning her racial authenticity are further compounded by her biracial heritage, her romantic relationships with white men, and her decision to have a child with white, French-Canadian Gabriel Aubry.

In a March 2011 interview with *Ebony* editor-in-chief Amy Dubois Barnett, Berry addresses questions concerning her racial authenticity. When asked by Barnett if she considered her daughter Nahla to be black or multiracial, Berry answers, “I think...that’s something she’s going to have to decide for herself,” suggesting a constructivist notion of race that posits racial identification as involving a level of choice for multiracial people. “I had to decide for myself,” continues Berry, the daughter of a black man and a white woman, “and that’s what she’s going to have to decide – how she identifies herself in the world.” Then, Berry contradicts her prior statement, saying, “But I feel like she’s Black. I’m Black and I’m her mother, and I believe in the one-drop theory.” In evoking “the one-drop rule,” Berry appeals to an essentialist understanding of blackness that contradicts her earlier assessment of race as a construction, in a bid to claim racial authenticity based on the inaccurate biology of scientific racism. When Barnett continues the interview with a question concerning Berry’s present and past relationships with white men, Berry feels obliged to assert her identification with the black “community”:

Well, first thing I want to say is that I’m very connected to my community, and I want Black people to know that I haven’t abandoned them because I’ve had a child with a man outside of my race and I’m dating someone now outside of my race who is Spanish and French. I have never been more clear about who I am as a Black woman. The people I have dated sort of hold up a mirror to me and help me realize more of who I really am. And who I really am is a Black woman who is struggling to make my race proud of me, who is struggling to move Black women forward in the profession I’ve chosen.⁹

⁹ Amy Dubois Barnett, “On the Very Solid, Fantastically Full Life of Halle Berry” *Ebony*, March 2011, available from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/hottopics/Inacademic> (accessed March 15, 2012).

Because the rhetoric of racial authenticity constructs black economic mobility and “interracial mixing” as fostering “assimilationists and race traitors,” Berry is burdened by the requirement to perform “authentic” blackness.¹⁰ She works to construct her racial authenticity, not only by pledging her allegiance to the black community, but by asserting her racial belonging based on biologically faulty notions of race as an essence. As a “symbolic African American,” Berry, like Horne before her, is compelled to perform her race.

Following Horne’s death on May 10, 2010, another African American “first,” Barack Obama, the first black President of the United States, publicly extended his condolences, stating he was “deeply saddened to hear about the passing of Lena Horne – one of our nation’s most cherished entertainers.” Citing Horne’s lifelong commitment to “the cause of justice and equality,” Obama offered his appreciation for “the progress she forged for our country.”¹¹ Another “highly symbolic” African American, Barack Obama once described himself as “a blank screen on which people of vastly different political stripes project their own views.”¹² As noted in the introduction, many scholars, including myself, have similarly argued that Horne’s racially ambiguous appearance and Hollywood representation offered audiences a “blank screen” – “which spectators use for their own projections.”¹³ In his “A More Perfect Union” address, also known as “Obama’s speech on race,” the presidential hopeful noted that he constantly faces

¹⁰ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 23.

¹¹ Dave Itzkoff, “After Lena Horne’s Death, Obama Offers Condolences,” Arts Beat, New York Times Blog, *The New York Times*, May 11, 2010, available from <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/11/after-lena-hornes-death-obama-offers-condolences/> (accessed March 5, 2012).

¹² Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Random House Large Print, 2006), 16.

¹³ Shari Roberts, “Seeing Stars: Feminine Spectacle, Female Spectators, and World War II Hollywood Musicals” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1993), 141; Karen Alexander, “Fatal Beauties: Black Women in Hollywood” in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill, 45-56 (New York: Routledge, 1991); also see Megan E. Williams, “Imaging Lena Horne: Race and Representation in 1940s America” (MA thesis, University of Kansas, 2006), 2-3; Richard Dyer, “Singing Prettily: Lena Horne in Hollywood” in *In the Space of a Song: The Uses of Song in Film*, kindle ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), loc. 3267-70.

criticism as “either ‘too black’ or ‘not black enough’” in his racial performance. These debates surrounding Obama’s racial authenticity, like those surrounding Horne in the past, largely stem from his class and color privilege as well as his, to use Golden’s words, “‘honorary White status.’”¹⁴ Just as the symbolic Horne was used to suggest the illusion of democracy during World War II, the symbolic Obama is used to suggest the illusion of a “post-racial” democracy in the twenty-first century. Of course, in reality the United States is a hypersegregated society. Heralded, by both his supporters and his detractors, as “evidence” of the American Dream obtained, the symbolic Obama upholds the colorblind meritocracy myth that blames the majority of African Americans, rather than institutionalized racism, sexism, and class inequality, for their inability to achieve the Dream.¹⁵ Just as the Hollywood-manufactured Horne did little to alter the structural inequalities that oppressed the majority of African Americans during World War II, as sociologist Roxanna Harlow contends, the Obama presidency will have only a minor “impact on the creation of social equality and full citizenship rights for black people.”¹⁶ Even with “a black face at the helm,” she argues, the United States remains a racist, sexist, imperialistic power, endeavoring to sustain white global dominance, under the guise of promoting liberty, equality, and individualism.¹⁷

“Now,” as Harlow suggests, “40 years after the Civil Rights Act became law, African Americans are still holding out hope for the social equality and white acceptance that always

¹⁴ Barack Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” (March 18, 2008) quoted in Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, “One Dream: Barack Obama, Race, and the American Dream,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 14, no. 1 (2011): 136. Barack Obama is the light-skinned son of a white American mother and a black African father. In addition to the privilege afforded light-skinned African Americans within the racist and colorist United States, several studies indicate that “black immigrants and their children do better educationally and economically than do the descendants of American slavery and Jim Crow.” See David A. Hollinger, “Obama, the Instability of Color Lines, and the Promise of a Postethnic Future,” *Callaloo* 31, no. 4 (2008): 1034.

¹⁵ Roxanna Harlow, “Barack Obama and the (In)Significance of His Presidential Campaign,” *Journal of African American Studies* 13 (2009): 164-166.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

seems to be just over the horizon with the next policy and the next black ‘first.’”¹⁸ In spite of Horne’s confidence in 1965 that the civil rights movement would render the “symbolic Negro” strategy of racial advancement obsolete, in the twenty-first century, Americans – black and white – continue to overinvest in the significance of black “firsts.” What we must realize, as Horne’s case makes clear, is that real equality is unachievable through symbolic representation alone; as Harlow argues, “representation, while important, is no match for true social and economic power.”¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

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